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The
Death Doctor
WILLIAM LE QUEUX



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THE DEATH-DOCTOR

"THE MASTER OF MYSTERY"



WILLIAM LE QUEUX'S NOVELS

OPINIONS in 1912

"Mr. William Le Queux retains his position as 'The Master of Mystery.' . . . He is far too skilful to allow pause for thought: he whirls his readers from incident to incident, holding their attention from the first page to the close of the book."—*Pall Mall Gazette*.

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7

The Death-Doctor

BEING THE REMARKABLE CONFESSIONS OF
ARCHIBALD MORE D'ESCOMBE, M.D., OF
KENSINGTON, LONDON, SELECTED

7 BY
LAURENCE LANNER-BROWN, M.D.,
and

7
EDITED BY
WILLIAM LE QUEUX



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NOTE BY LAURENCE LANNER-BROWN, M.D.,
OF EARL'S COURT ROAD, LONDON

Some year and a half ago, my friend and erstwhile neighbour, Dr. Archibald More d'Escombe, died suddenly, and shortly after his decease I received from his solicitors a sealed packet addressed to me in his handwriting, with instructions that it was not to be opened until after his death.

Dr. More d'Escombe and I had been close friends for some years; first in the little Devonshire town of Okehampton, until he migrated to London, where I found him several years later, when I myself set up in practice in Earl's Court Road.

As I first remember him, he was a smart, slight, good-looking man—dark and clean-shaven, with an easy and taking manner—a favourite with all, especially the female sex, a clever medical, but at the same time excellent at bridge and at most games and sports, both indoor and out.

His wife was a pretty, well-meaning little woman, but entirely eclipsed by her smart, successful and fascinating husband.

In Okehampton, Dr. More d'Escombe was certainly the most popular figure, while in Kensington he was extremely well known and enjoyed a very wide and lucrative practice. Therefore

it came as a great shock to me when I read the manuscript after his death and, to my horror, discovered what I should never have thought possible, yet, alas! only too plainly, how a clever, unscrupulous, and yet, in a way, plucky man of my own profession, possessed of deep knowledge and learning, can hoodwink, deceive and plunder the world in general, not even excluding his most intimate friends and acquaintances.

He having left it entirely at my discretion, I propose, with the assistance of my friend, Mr. William Le Queux, to publish a few episodes of his varied and venturesome career because, as he says in his MSS.: "I leave no one behind me, and therefore there is no reason why some of the fools in the world should not be shown how blind and credulous they may be, especially if one fully comprehends the power of flattery—a great power."

At the risk of condemnation by the whole medical profession and perhaps by the public at large, I have selected a few of the many striking and astounding incidents he records—the majority being entirely unsuited to the public eye—and wherever possible I quote his own words.

"Let my career serve as a warning to others," he urges, and mainly for that reason I have ventured to publish this remarkable record.

LAURENCE LANNER-BROWN.

Earl's Court Road, W.

July, 1912.

CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I.—IN WHICH THERE IS OPEN CONFESSION.	I
II.—IN WHICH A LADY IS CONCERNED . . .	52
III.—IN WHICH I DISCLOSE A SECRET . . .	77
IV.—IN WHICH I EARN A BIG FEE . . .	86
V.—IN WHICH MY LOVE AFFAIR IS EX- PLAINED	97
VI.—IN WHICH I OBLIGE A LADY . . .	108
VII.—IN WHICH A RISKY COUP IS DESCRIBED	119
VIII.—IN WHICH A PROBLEM IS PRESENTED .	134
IX.—IN WHICH I ATTEND AN ECCENTRIC PATIENT	145
X.—IN WHICH I SILENCE AN ENEMY . . .	159
XI.—IN WHICH I ATTEND A STRANGE CASE .	178
XII.—IN WHICH A PATIENT GROWS CONFI- DENTIAL	192
XIII.—IN WHICH MRS. AUBERON'S SECRET IS REVEALED	206
XIV.—IN WHICH THE AVENUE ROAD MYSTERY IS EXPLAINED	238
XV.—IN WHICH I MAKE A LITTLE PRESENT .	278
XVI.—IN WHICH A RED-HAIRED LADY SHEDS TEARS	311
XVII.—IN WHICH I AM DISCOVERED . . .	337



THE DEATH-DOCTOR

CHAPTER I

IN WHICH THERE IS OPEN CONFESSION

I AM fully aware, my dear Lanner-Brown, that after my death, when you open these pages, you will be greatly shocked.

The skeleton which for many years has been locked so securely in my cupboard, and which I now at last have courage to reveal, will, I know, stagger you.

I, Archibald More d'Escombe, have enjoyed a lucrative practice in Kensington. I have worked hard, and I believe I have not only earned the esteem of my many patients of both sexes, but also that of my fellow-men. I have been moderate in my habits, partial perhaps to a really good vintage port, but nevertheless a constant churchgoer; for some years churchwarden of St. Stephen's, and, in addition, a regular subscriber to all local

charities, as far as my means as a medical man would allow.

Outwardly, I suppose, I have differed in no way to the many thousand other men who, having walked the hospitals, have qualified and now practise the science of medicine up and down the country. But when, my dear Lanner-Brown, you have read this plain, matter-of-fact and yet remarkable narrative of my amazing life, it will be for you yourself to judge whether it be best, in the public interest, to suppress it and destroy the manuscript, or whether you will risk the condemnation, which must be hurled upon you by the public and the whole medical profession, and publish it as a warning to others who may, by their expert scientific knowledge, be led into similar temptation.

This matter I leave entirely in your hands, and at your discretion.

Though in the following pages you will, no doubt, discover much that will astound and even appal you, yet many of the circumstances you will yourself recall. I think you will find that in this record I have been entirely frank and open, and agree that I have all along admitted the motive, and have never sought to shield myself, either by excuse or by hypocrisy.

During the last eight years of our pleasant and intimate acquaintance, I have ever held you in the highest esteem. You are a real man. True, you as a confirmed bachelor were always something of a lady-killer, while you believed me to be indeed the quiet-mannered, rather short-sighted, and perhaps somewhat old-fashioned, family-practitioner in whom you so often confided.

Ah! I often wondered what you would actually have thought of me had you but known the ugly, wretched truth. And sometimes—forgive me, my dear fellow—I have smiled at your ignorance.

But here, in moments snatched from the constant hustle of a wide and growing practice, I have written down the secret of my changeful life complete—perhaps you will term it terrible.

You, my old chum, will be the first to judge me. And I know, alas, too well! the nature of your judgment—a bitter judgment, which will be confirmed by any who afterwards may be permitted by you to peruse these pages.

But I offer no apology, either to you or to the public. Indeed, I have none to offer. Whether I regret matters not to you. Neither

does the awful, heart-piercing remorse which has, in these last days, so tortured me.

No! all that concerns you is the truth regarding my disgraceful past. My future, now that I am passing in silence to the great Unknown, lies in my own hands.

If I spoke of atonement, you yourself would accuse me of hypocrisy, and dismiss me as a canting humbug. Therefore, upon that one point I am silent.

I intend only to relate hard, solid facts, and leave you to form your own conclusions.

Before dilating on some of the various incidents which occurred in my career after I became a qualified medical man, however, it would be as well, I think, if I gave you a little information about my earlier days. Not that I wish to make any excuses for myself or my doings, but simply to give you an idea as to my more youthful experiences and doings.

As you know, I qualified comparatively late in life. I was twenty-six before I could write those eight letters, M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P., after my name, which not only enabled me to practise medicine and surgery, but also, above all other things, gave me the power to sign a death-certificate.

That is the all-important point. Knowledge is power.

Most students of medicine become qualified at somewhere about twenty-three or four, but when I should have been doing well I had made a rather poor mess of things.

A father who had cut down his own personal expenses to a minimum, and a mother who, late in life, continued to churn her own butter at our Sussex farmhouse-home in order to provide me with a reasonable income, had both been grievously disappointed.

I had been sent up to Oxford, like so many others, with the reputation of a budding scholar; but instead of doing anything of note, I simply obtained a pass-degree which, as you know, means very little indeed; and then, after putting in another couple of years at Guy's, I found myself no further on, having still my intermediate-final to pass, nor, indeed, could I have answered many simple questions in anatomy or physiology, although my knowledge of billiards, bridge, actors and actresses was remarkably good.

Thus, when my father died suddenly, and with him my income, the chances I possessed of becoming a practitioner of medicine had apparently disappeared, for what he did leave

was only just enough to keep my mother and sisters in genteel poverty.

"What the devil am I fit for?" I asked my friend Aitkin one day. "I might become a billiard-marker, or a racing tout; but I'm not fit for much else. I really am a most useless beggar."

"Poor old chap," said he, "you're badlyhipped, and well you may be, but don't chuck up the sponge. Put an advertisement in the *Telegraph*. Sit down, man, and write it straight away. I'll see to it for you."

Poor old Tom! he was a good chap—peace to his ashes—he was shot in a drinking-bar in California.

Well, I wrote as he suggested:

"YOUNG GENTLEMAN; Oxford degree; some knowledge of medicine; accustomed to good society; musical, speaks French well, desires post as secretary or travelling companion—D'Escombe, *Telegraph* Office, Fleet Street."

"That's all right," laughed Tom, "but you don't mention your real accomplishments, I notice. You should add, 'Has taken prizes for consumption of beer; an excellent pool-player; irresistible manner with ladies, and wide experience in card playing.'"

"Don't be a fool, Tom," I growled. "Take

the infernal scribble away—much good will it do.”

“Farewell!” said Tom dramatically, and the next I heard about the advertisement, three days later, was a letter forwarded to my lodgings from the *Telegraph* office, asking me to call at a house in Redcliffe Gardens on the following afternoon.

In the interim I had refused my mother’s offer to go home for a while, and had sorted out my goods and chattels, many of which I sold at a great loss, as was but natural.

In the event of the advertisement being a failure I had decided to try my luck in America. However, here was a possibility. I looked at the letter a second and third time—expensive paper, with a faint perfume about it; faint, but very distinctive. It is a curious fact, but one never forgets a smell in the way one loses a name, or a face. The nose is the most reliable of organs. It cannot forget, but always recognizes any odour out of the common which has once been smelt; and this perfume, even to the present day, brings back to me the memory of my bare, untidy lodgings off Tottenham Court Road on that last day of my freedom from serious and worldly affairs.

The letter was written in a feminine hand neat but unformed, and concluded with a bold masculine signature: "Horatio Augustus Featherson."

I clothed myself that afternoon in a blue serge suit—luckily my wardrobe was well stocked and in good condition—and looking in the glass to view the *tout ensemble* saw, not the professional-looking individual whom you have known as More d'Escombe, but a slight, dark young man, with a—I may as well say it—clean-cut, rather handsome face, a small waxed dark moustache, and a clear, almost olive, complexion.

I do not wish to eulogize my appearance as it then was, for after all, good looks are only worth what they will bring to the pocket, and depend upon the country and surroundings in which one lives; a man or woman passing as handsome in one continent may be looked upon as positively ugly in another. It all depends on the standard of beauty in the immediate market.

A smartly-dressed housemaid showed me to the presence of Mr. Featherson, who, immaculately dressed, was sitting reading in a cosily furnished smoking-room.

As I entered, he rose, and I saw that he

had greatly the advantage of me in height, and was thin and aristocratic in appearance. He could not have been less than six feet two.

"Good afternoon, Mr. d'Escombe," he said in a pleasant voice as he shook hands, "it's very good of you to come at such short notice, I'm sure. Will you smoke?" And as he motioned me to a chair he handed me a box of "Sultans," such as I had smoked myself in palmier days. "Would you be so kind, Mr. d'Escombe," he continued rather stiffly, "as to give me some idea why you are seeking such a post as you mention? What references you propose to offer, and what experience, if any, of clerical work you have had?"

My answer to this was, as I had pre-determined, to tell the whole story of my crass stupidity in the past, and thus show my condition in the present.

"You appear to have a rather pleasing capacity for enjoying yourself, Mr. d'Escombe," said he, with a grim smile on his thin face, which showed two gold-stopped teeth through his drooping grey moustache, and which caused at the same time innumerable tiny wrinkles to appear at the corners of his deep-set, calm grey eyes. "But other things being equal, I think you will do for me excellently. You see, I

want a man who, while possessing some common sense, is willing to be instructed by me to do things in my way—fallow ground to work on, as it were—and I gather that by now you have sown and reaped the majority of your wild oats.”

“I think I have,” I laughed. “And I will certainly do my very best to meet your requirements—if you are so good as to give me a chance.” And yet, Laurence, as I said it the curious glitter in the man’s eyes, an undefinable *something* in his manner, gave me the idea that he was not exactly “straight.” Still, I could do nothing; it would have been sheer madness to refuse.

“I’m going abroad in a couple of days,” he said; “I and my daughter. Could you join me here to-morrow? Oh! and as to salary. I can offer you a hundred a year, and pay all your expenses—reasonable expenses, that is,” and as he smiled his eyes contracted and the thousand tiny wrinkles got deeper, and many others quite unsuspected suddenly appeared.

“I can be here at any time you wish, Mr. Featherson,” was my answer. “I have only to pack a couple of bags.”

“Very well, then; to-morrow for lunch at

one-thirty." He pressed the electric bell, saying, "The maid will show you the way out. *Au revoir.*"

I opened the door expecting to see the maid, but as she did not appear I closed it after me, intending to find my own way out. It was all very curious, I thought. No further word as to references—nothing as to notice. He seemed to have, as it were, jumped at me.

I was on the point of letting myself out of the front door when a girl came into the hall—a girl, I say, but I cannot describe her adequately. She was beyond the limits of my poor powers, but sweet, delicate, wonderfully pretty, were the impressions on my mind at the moment. She appeared to be quite young, and dressed in white. Her great, dark eyes were open widely as she came, her finger suggestively raised, rapidly towards me.

"You are Mr. d'Escombe?" she said in a low, half-frightened whisper, and as she said it the perfume on the writing-paper was no secret, for I now smelt it a second time—a sweet, subtle scent.

"Have you seen my father?" she asked, as I nodded assent to her first question, too taken aback by her attitude and sudden appearance to speak.

"Yes, thank you," I answered in a low voice, recovering my self-possession; "but what——"

She held up her hand. "S-shh! Please don't talk, Mr. d'Escombe. I want to warn you. Don't come back here, on any account." She glanced apprehensively at the staircase and continued, "I don't want my father to know that I've seen you, but please, please don't come back. You'll regret it very, very deeply." And then, as a noise came from somewhere above, she turned, saying, "For your own sake go away, and do not return," and disappeared quickly through a door near; while I, my brain awlirl, let myself quietly out of the hall door.

Once again I found myself in the street, away from the mysterious house and its strange occupants. I walked on utterly dumb-founded. "Don't come back—regret it—" what could she mean, and who was she? Featherson's daughter? He had mentioned a daughter.

Certainly it was a most amazing and curious state of affairs, but one thing I was determined upon. I would go back, and all the more readily if that sweet-faced girl were to be one of the party to go abroad; and besides what

could happen? It was certain that I should keep my eyes very wide open after receiving that mysterious warning.

As a matter of fact, I felt bucked up and buoyant in the face of that afternoon's happenings. "Hurrah," I thought with glee, "I'm in for a real good thing—with a spice of adventure in it!"

I spent a busy evening writing letters and packing, and next day, at half-past one, ascended the steps of the house of Featherson, a man staggering behind me with two large kit bags and a suit case.

Featherson himself came into the hall as I entered and invited me into his den.

"Come in, Mr. d'Escombe. Come in. Let me introduce you to my daughter, Ella. She has not long left school, and is going to travel with us—little minx——" and he chucked her under the chin, in—to my mind—a rather vulgar manner.

The girl reddened, and then shaking hands with me, asked if I had travelled much.

"I lived in Paris with my uncle for a while as a lad," I answered, "therefore, I speak the language fairly well."

"Excuse me one moment, d'Escombe," said the master of the house, leaving the room, at

which action I felt somewhat awkward, hardly knowing what to say. But the girl spoke at once:

"So you have come back! You refused to take my advice," she said in a low, reproachful voice.

"Miss Featherson," I answered, "I know nothing of your reasons for giving me such advice; but work, occupation, I must have. I daren't say no to anything decent."

"I'm so very sorry," was her answer; "I know you will bitterly regret your action. But there—it's done now," and throwing off her mysterious tone and manner she began to chatter about our coming travels, and I could not help thinking that she was pleased, rather than angry, at my refusal to accept her advice. This was to be her first long journey with her father. She had stayed with him for short periods during her school life at Brighton, but now the dear old days were over.

"Won't you explain your remarks of yesterday?" I inquired after a while. "I cannot understand things at all—why——"

"Not another syllable please, Mr. d'Escombe," she interrupted. "I beg you to forget every word I said, and ask you particularly to say nothing to my father." As she spoke I thought

I caught a gleam of fear, even of terror, in her dark eyes as she glanced towards the door.

"Very well, not another word," I laughed. "But why do you talk of 'the dear old days'?"

"Ah! I was very happy in the convent school, everybody was very kind to me, and I was never left alone with nothing to do. Now father often has to leave me for whole days, and I am not even allowed out without him," was her answer, made with a most adorable pout. Certainly she was charmingly pretty, and apparently innocence and freshness itself.

And yet, what did she know? Why the warning? I racked my brains to try and discover the mystery.

In four days' time we were comfortably settled in an hotel at Sorrento. You know that little Italian town, I believe. You went there one winter. It is hard to find a more charming spot in the whole of that land of colour and picturesque beauty.

The hotel, built upon the edge of the high cliff which forms the "seaward" wall of the town, was full, at that season, of tourists and visitors—English, American, German and French—as also were all the other hotels in the place.

Ella and I soon became the greatest of friends and allies, and one afternoon, as we walked together at sundown, she gave me the reason of her warning in London.

"I hate to tell you, Mr. d'Escombe," she said, "but I am certain, from what I have seen in the few short visits and holidays that I've had with my father, that he does not make his living in a nice way. I'm sure that he plays cards a lot, and I simply hate the men he often plays with; and yet——" and she hesitated.

"Yet—what?" I inquired anxiously. Her admissions made me feel most anxious, and, at the same time, curious.

"And yet sometimes he plays with quite young men—almost boys—and I'm afraid—well, Mr. d'Escombe—you know."

"Yes; I know what you mean, Miss Ella. You think that he persuades them to play, and wins their money, eh?"

"Yes, yes—but not unfairly. I can't believe that father would ever do anything so really horrid."

"Of course not, Miss Ella," I replied, feeling at the same time that my eyes were opened, and that I had cast in my lot with one of those genteel social vampires so common in the big

cities of Europe. Yet, so far, I had nothing but Ella's suspicions to go upon. I had been given nothing to do personally, except to make travelling and hotel arrangements—and even the names of the hotels were given to me; and I had been told, at all times, to assume a grand air, and give the idea that we were folk of great importance.

"If you do this," explained Featherson, "we shall get well looked after, and obtain the best of rooms and attendance. Money talks, you know."

In Sorrento I saw very little of my employer. He obtained a footing very rapidly in the great card-playing set of the town, and he told me that he was making quite "a pot of money."

In the meantime I was told off to look after his daughter, and Ella and I spent much time wandering about the beautiful countryside, and making little excursions to Naples, Capri, Amalfi, and the various other adjacent places of interest.

Of course, the inevitable happened, and I fell quite seriously in love with my charming little companion. I managed to keep my secret to myself; how I hardly know. But I did; yet, of course, she knew. As the days

passed I found myself, when not with Ella, very frequently in the company of an American visitor in the hotel—a small man with very piercing blue eyes and a marked American accent. Ella took an instinctive dislike to him, although he was always extremely attentive and polite to her, and I think I got more of her society than I should otherwise have done on this account, as she seemed to hate to see me with the American, and even went so far as to interrupt us on several occasions.

On the whole, however, life moved both pleasantly and quietly, although I could not help feeling that I was living on the edge of a quiescent volcano which might, at any moment, become active.

I was right. The activity was very strange, and very serious.

One evening, after we had been living at the hotel for about three weeks, shortly after dinner had commenced, an English lady who was staying there with her husband came in late—a very unusual thing for her to do; and it was evident to all in the room that she was very agitated about something.

Her husband was sitting at their *table-à-deux* waiting for her, but on listening to the statement which she made to him in an undertone,

he got up hastily and left the dining-room, everybody, of course, wondering what could be wrong.

Our curiosity was very soon gratified, for the manager of the hotel, a tall, red-bearded Pole, who spoke seven languages fluently, came into the *salle-à-manger*, and announced in a loud voice:

“Ladies and gentlemen, mesdames et messieurs, a visitor has had her jewellery stolen from her room. I have summoned the police. I must, therefore, most reluctantly, and, with many regrets, ask everybody present to keep their seats until the officers arrive. The jewellery was seen by its owner half an hour ago, consequently I am compelled to think that someone in the hotel must be responsible for the loss.”

He repeated this statement in French and Italian, and at the conclusion of his remarks every guest was looking round covertly at the occupiers of the other tables, wondering the while who among that gay, well-dressed party was the thief.

Ella and I were dining *tête-à-tête*, as Mr. Featherson had been away since lunch. I noticed that she went deadly pale as the manager talked, and I feared that she was

going to faint. But she quickly pulled herself together.

"How dreadful it is to be mixed up in an affair like this!" she said across to me. "It makes me feel quite ill. What will they do?"

"Can't say," I answered. "Unless they search us all, and our baggage too."

At this moment my employer, with a fine diamond stud in his dress-shirt, strolled into the room and walked to our table, all the eyes in the room being fixed on his tall figure.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed, "everybody seems very quiet—it's more like a funeral than a dinner," and he glanced in an unconcerned way around the big dining-room. "Sorry to be late, little girlie," he said, smiling at his pale-faced daughter, "but I've only just got away from the 'Grand.' Been playing bridge, and had jolly good luck—grand slam on no trumps. But what the deuce *is* the matter?" he continued, with another quick glance around the room, where all the other diners sat almost silent, and, with but few exceptions, looking at him.

"Mrs. Cass has just had her jewels stolen, father," answered the girl in a low, frightened voice; "and the manager says we're all to sit here until the police come."

"Oh, ho!" he laughed, "and they suspect some of us, do they? Well, we can only offer to be searched—eh?" Glancing at me: "You don't mind, do you, d'Escombe? You haven't been a naughty boy—have you?"

"Not I," I said, "I don't steal jewels." And I smiled grimly.

"Very well, then ;—here, *garçon!*"

A sleek, obsequious waiter appeared.

"Ask the manager if he will speak to me," said my employer.

He was always obeyed, this tall, slight, quietly spoken man, and the waiter appeared in a few moments with the Pole.

"Look here," exclaimed my employer; "we want to be off. Can't we be searched and go? I'm quite willing to set the example, although I haven't been in the hotel all the evening. And this lady and gentleman," nodding at us, "are also anxious to clear their characters."

"The police have just arrived, Signore," replied the manager, who looked most uncomfortable and unhappy. He beckoned to a quietly dressed little man who had just entered the room. "This gentleman, M'sieur Feather-son, and his party, wish to be searched, and thus set an example for all the guests," he explained.

"*Benissimo*," answered the little man, looking intently at Featherson and myself. "Please come with me."

We went into the inner office of the hotel, and were certainly most thoroughly gone through. We could not have successfully hidden a pin. Ella had been taken to another room by a woman, and came out looking even whiter than before. We all three then went for a stroll in the beautiful hotel grounds, for the weather was fine, and the moon delightfully bright and clear.

"A very unpleasant business," declared Featherson. "Ella, you're looking quite queer and ill."

"I feel faint, father," was her answer. "I think I'll go to my room."

We two men walked on a short distance, and were then joined by my American friend—Mr. James B. Rowe.

"I guess those jewels are gone for 'keeps'," he volunteered to us. "I reckon the crook who took them was too cute for most folk," he added.

"What makes you think that?" asked my companion.

"Wal," drawled the New Yorker, "by the time they've gone through all the baggage and

all the folks in the dining-sal-oon, there will not be a guest in the hotel unaccounted for except yourself, Mr. Featherson."

"What do you mean?" asked my employer hotly.

"What I say, sir," replied the American. "All the guests came down from their bedrooms dressed for dinner, so there has not been any opportunity for hiding six fairly bulky cases, has there? But where's the little missie?"

"She's gone in. This wretched business has upset her," said I, breaking in upon the conversation, not relishing the tone which it had taken between the other two.

The American glanced quickly at Mr. Featherson, who had pushed a little ahead of us, when suddenly he stumbled and fell heavily to the ground.

I rushed forward to pick him up.

"Curse it, I've strained my ankle again," he said. "How deuced unfortunate. I've done it about four times already, and it means no walking for me for three or four days at the least. I say, Mr. Rowe, would you be kind enough to run into the hotel, and ask two strong waiters to bring along a chair to carry me inside? I daren't put my foot to the ground."

Rowe, evidently not too pleased, started off to do as he was asked.

The moment he was out of sight, Feather-son's face changed its expression. "Here, d'Escombe, quick!" he said, speaking in a half whisper. "If you love Ella—and I believe you do—help me now. That man's a detective, one of the shrewdest. The jewels are in a wooden ventilator, in the corridor by my bedroom. Now listen."

I was so thunderstruck by his words, that I could not speak.

"When Rowe comes back I shall ask him to help me in, and I shall send you for some brandy. Go quickly to our rooms, and, if they have been searched, then take the stuff out of the ventilator, give them to Ella, and tell her to hide them in her room for a short time."

I gasped. By Jove, I was new to crime in those days, and the calm way in which this immaculate gentleman owned up to being a common thief was too much for me.

"Hurry man," he added, "or it's all up. This infernal accident prevents me doing anything for myself—or are you going to denounce me?"

A moment only was allowed me to decide

on the matter—a serious enough one, Heaven knows!—whether or not to become the confederate of a *rat d'hôtel*. But the thought of poor little Ella, and also of the probable profit which would accrue, decided me. Besides, if I did tell what I knew I was stranded, almost penniless, in a foreign country.

“All right—I’ll do what I can,” I answered, just as Rowe returned with the waiters. He hadn’t wasted any time, and, evidently suspecting Featherson, did not intend to lose sight of him. I ran to meet him. “I am just going to get a little brandy, Mr. Featherson is feeling queer,” I exclaimed as I passed the trio. But I noticed that Rowe turned and looked at me with evident suspicion.

I reached Ella’s door panting and short of breath, and when she answered my knock I noticed that her eyes were red and tearful.

“What is it?” she whispered hoarsely. “Have they found out?”

“Found out what?”

“That he—that my father stole the jewels?” she gasped.

“No, no,” I said. “But what do you know——?”

“I saw him coming from the woman’s room,” she interrupted, her face ghastly white.

"Have the police searched your rooms yet?" I inquired. "There's no time to lose."

"Yes, yes, all the three."

"Then I'm going to give them to you to hide, according to your father's instructions," I said in an undertone. "I'm just going to my room to get something to cover the cases with, and shall be back in a minute or two if the corridor is clear—luckily it's not much used."

I slipped on my big motor-coat and strolled along to the place Featherson had indicated, trying to look unconcerned, but my heart was thumping nervously away. I could feel it very distinctly, and that's a bad sign. The coast, however, was clear. Evidently the entries and exits of the big hotel were well guarded. In a few moments, however, I had transferred the cases, which I found in the ventilator, into my commodious pockets. Just as I finished a waiter turned the corner of the corridor, but luckily there was a bath-room close by, so I sauntered into it just in the nick of time, although I admit I listened intently to see if any alarm were sounded.

No, all was quiet, so I again emerged and went post-haste to Ella's room, where I handed her the cases. There was no time for talking,

so I rushed downstairs for the brandy. I had been delayed too long, however, for as I reached the hall the chair containing the injured man was carried up the front stairs by the waiters, the man Rowe still being in attendance, most kind and sympathetic.

"Too late, d'Escombe," said Feathersson with a sickly smile, and then turning to his carriers, "Right up to my room—Number 81—and thank you so much for your kindness, sir," he continued, turning to the American. "I shall be quite all right now."

"I guess I'll come up with you, and see you put all O.K.," answered the other. "I reckon I know some about sprains—and bullet wounds," he added with a side wink at me.

"I really could not trouble you. My daughter can do all that is necessary. She knows exactly how to fix me up," said Feathersson, with an air which said very distinctly "Stand off."

"Very well. If you won't have me, you won't. I'll look in and see you in the forenoon," the American said, and as he walked away I felt that he knew he was temporarily repulsed.

"Come on, boy," said the injured man to me, and in a few moments we three—he, Ella

and I—were in his bedroom with the door locked.

“Where’s the stuff,” he inquired, as, much to my astonishment, he got off the chair and walked silently yet firmly to the door, and examined the keyhole. Ella and I stared at each other, neither able to repress a smile at his able tactics and excellent acting.

There was certainly nothing wrong with his ankle.

He glanced at us, caught the expression upon our faces, and said, “You’re both of you in it now—you understand? And you’ve got to help, you’ve no alternative.”

His pale-faced daughter, shaking with excitement and emotion, half-sobbed out the words, “Oh, father, is it really true? Are you a thief? And yet it must be, because I saw you leave Mrs. Cass’s room with the jewel-cases, and I know you got out of your bedroom window afterwards. I was looking out of mine, and saw you.”

She broke down altogether, and then turning to me said hoarsely, “Mr. d’Escombe, you must leave us. You must not be mixed up in this affair.”

“Be quiet, Ella,” interrupted her father severely. “And mind your own business.

Mr. d'Escombe can quite well manage his own affairs." Then, turning to me, he said, "You see how you stand, and I promise you your fair share of the profits. Everything is safe enough now, and, if I am any judge of character, you are not going to refuse five hundred pounds on account of moral scruples. Here's fifty to go on with."

The fellow knew me better than I knew myself, for I did not refuse. The lure of the money, and the attraction of Ella combined, were too much for me. So, in spite of the tearful protestations of his daughter, I arranged to convey the jewel-cases to his room in about half an hour.

"We'll come to a definite agreement later on," said the tall, polite adventurer. "At present, we must be careful; that infernal American is suspicious. I expect another visit from him—although he knows nothing about me."

According to the arrangement, I smuggled the well-worn leather cases to his room, and watched him, tall and big as he was, crawl out of the window, and so hand-over-hand up an iron ventilating shaft, and deposit the cases on the roof of the hotel. The window having been re-closed and fastened, my agile friend reclined on a couch in the room, while I rang

for a waiter, who brought the two whiskies and sodas which he ordered.

"Now, d'Escombe—to business," said my employer when we were again alone. "It was impossible to talk while Ella was here. Poor little girl, she's had a bit of a shock, I'm afraid. But you see how things are, and how I make a precarious, but not unhandsome, livelihood. My only reason for obtaining your valuable services was to get help and, if possible, bring you up in the way I would wish you to go. Now will you go on helping, or not? Do as you like; there's risk, of course, but there's excitement—there's *life* and there's money—if you choose."

"I've already decided," I answered. "I will help you until I have enough to comfortably qualify on, and after that I shall go my own way. At the same time, I may as well tell you that I am very fond of Ella."

Her father laughed.

"Any reason, so long as you stay, dear boy. Your innocent face is quite valuable to me," he said. "But now listen. Later on, to-night, I shall remove the jewels from those cases, and they must be got away from here, sewn up in Ella's dress; the cases themselves I shall leave on the roof."

"You're surely not going to implicate her as deeply as that Featherson?" I queried, dropping the prefix for the first time.

"Mr. Featherson, if you please," he interrupted sharply. "It is necessary that you keep on the same old terms with me; you might forget at the wrong moment. Yes; Ella must help on this occasion. I fear that detective might make another excuse to get me examined again, and I hardly think he will worry a lady a second time."

"All right," I said, giving in to him, and then I told Ella what was expected of her later on. I had a good deal of trouble. There were many tears to be kissed away, and many "nothings" to be spoken, before I could get her to see things from our point of view.

About ten o'clock—ah! how long the evening seemed—I strolled into the lounge.

"I guess you'll find your hands full up, sonny," said a voice which I now heard with aversion and some fear. "How's that darned ankle, anyway?"

It was Rowe.

"It's going on very well, thank you; and, as you say, I *have* a great deal to do just now," I answered coldly, as I walked away. I was not desirous of being questioned by the

objectionable American who, it was very evident, suspected my employer.

In the small hours of the morning, the jewels were taken from their hiding-place and put into Ella's care. After that we two men had a long talk in undertones, the outcome of which was that I wrote to the Hôtel International in Algiers, requesting that rooms should be reserved for Count Binetti and daughter.

A great fuss was made over the loss of Mrs. Cass's valuables, but nothing was discovered; and, after a couple of days of constant anxiety, I was very glad to leave the hotel with Featherson and Ella.

We had booked rooms at Bertolini's in Naples—a delightful hotel—and it was certainly a great pleasure to be away from the constant espionage of James Rowe, whom, however, we met afterwards in the town; which fact proved Featherson's wisdom in preserving his limp and bandaged ankle for the time being.

Two days later, however, I left, as I obtained a passage on a small Italian steamer to Algiers, my two companions promising to follow later by a regular boat due to sail in a week's time.

I registered at the Hôtel International as Monsieur Boileau, representing myself to be a French tourist, and here my knowledge of the language stood me in good stead.

This was the initial move in a new plot of Featherson's to make further money; and when, in due course, Count Binetti and his daughter arrived, I was passed by with a haughty stare from that tall, supercilious-looking aristocrat. Counts, of course, are numerous in Continental hotels, but few of them have the superb manner and presence of that able swindler with whom I was now in partnership.

By careful arrangement, the Count's table was next to mine in the dining-room, and in a day or two he condescended to smoke a cigarette with me, while his daughter—bless her little heart—became quite friendly. Poor girl! She was most unhappy, but could not desert her father, although she knew he was contemplating another risky *coup*.

The young Prince de Montelupo arrived at the hotel shortly after Featherson, and with him were his mother and two or three other grand ladies and gentlemen with long names and titles—and much jewellery.

Everything was now ready for our adventure, and early one morning, about half-past one,

having warned Ella, Featherson and myself went to either end of the long building and set fire to two fuses which would burn long enough to enable us to return to our rooms. This business was very carefully timed, and almost as soon as we got back first one loud report and then another resounded and thundered through the corridors and halls of the big hotel. Immediately pandemonium reigned around us, which my partner and I added to by shouting: "Fire! Fire!"

Truly our carefully prepared little explosive smoke-balls were sufficient to stir anyone up!

Out of their bedrooms, panic-stricken and shrieking, rushed the guests. A few stayed to throw on a dressing-gown or some light garment, but all hurried helter-skelter to get down the escape stairs and outside the building as rapidly as possible. Meanwhile, two figures in capacious dressing-gowns with large inside pockets and with a bag slung round their waists hurried from room to room collecting jewellery of all kinds, watches, money, pocket-books—in fact anything portable or valuable.

These two, my dear Lanner-Brown, were, of course, Featherson and myself, Ella having rushed out with the frightened crowd.

We knew the scare would be over very

quickly, but the smoke from our fire-balls was dense and acrid, and we had time to fill our pockets and bags, and then, by a back staircase which we had previously reconnoitred, we joined the other agitated guests who were standing in the hotel grounds watching the smoking building. Some were hysterical, others half fainting, and, being mostly foreigners, all were in a state of panic. But I saw that already servants and waiters were returning within the building, and it was certain that an alarm of robbery would be raised very soon.

Our plans, however, were deeply laid. We had settled upon a temporary hiding-place for our plunder, and very soon the miscellaneous collection we had annexed was deposited in a large marble cup, which was raised about nine feet high by the hand of a life-sized statue which stood in a dark pathway. My friend's shoulder made an excellent step for me to reach this hiding-place. This done, we hurried out of the garden and separately joined the throng now re-entering the hotel. Here we found that the police were already in charge, and that there were rumours of an audacious robbery.

Soon note-books were produced by the police-agents, and the general excitement and indig-

nation of the inmates of the hotel became intense as they made out the list of their losses. By Jove! Laurence! if half the curses showered upon our heads had come to pass we should have had a very hot time. Of course, we had, each of us, lost articles of value, and joined most heartily in execrating the thieves. Indeed, we also put in a claim for what had been taken!

Of course, nothing was discovered, and in two days' time I returned to Naples, Feather-son and Ella following me very shortly. She, poor child, seemed to have lost her good looks; her brightness and vivacity had disappeared, and she was ready to cry at the slightest thing.

Featherson, cute customer, knocked the stones from their settings and brought them away in his pockets, first having cast the settings into the sea.

Once more reunited in Naples, we held another council of war. Feather-son suggested that he should take his daughter back to France, where it was to be hoped she would throw off the depression and melancholy which had recently obsessed her, and afterwards betake himself to Antwerp, at which centre of stolen goods he could get rid of the spoils of the two adventures in which I had taken part.

"But how about me?" I inquired. "What am I to do? Where am I to go in the meantime? I feel a little too close to Algiers for real comfort, just at present!"

"Discretion, dear boy," laughed the old rascal. "Why don't you take a run to Monte Carlo? Have a little flutter. I know—go to the 'Hermitage,' and I'll join you there as soon as I can fix things up. You'll find it excellent, though expensive. And you can keep your eyes well open there."

"Right ho!" I answered. "But what about cash? I haven't very much left. You must give me some more. I've only had fifty."

"Yes, yes; you must have some, I suppose," he replied grudgingly. And taking out his bulky pocket-book: "Here's another fifty for you—five tenners. They must last till I do the business," and he gave a most villainous wink.

I was not exactly happy over this arrangement. What if he made off, and never came near me again!

"How do I know that you'll come back, Featherson?" I queried, thinking it best to speak out straight.

"You don't," he laughed. "You've got to trust me. But I'll be back in a week or ten

days, don't worry, boy." And I had to be content with this meagre assurance.

However, Laurence, he did come back—to find me at the "Hermitage" and stone-broke. I'd lost every sou at the tables, and my hotel-bill was owing—a big one!

"Thank Heaven you've turned up," I said as he swaggered in, immaculately dressed. "Have you managed all right?"

"So so," said he. "Let's have a whisky and soda. I'll be your guest to-day. I'm staying at the 'Regina.'" That wasn't the hotel he named—for it would hardly do to indicate it here.

His manner was supercilious, and I somehow scented trouble.

"How much have you got for me?" I asked in an undertone as we sat at a little table in the winter garden.

"I'm afraid I can't make it more than—let's see, you've had a hundred?—another four hundred."

"What?" I interrupted angrily. "Only four hundred, and what have you netted? Five thousand, or more!"

"Steady, boy—steady!" The old rascal smiled grimly at me. "You must leave things to me. In fact," and he involuntarily

stiffened himself, "you are in my hands entirely, and you will have to take what I can afford. I told you so before."

"Why you told me perhaps I'd get two thousand—and now——" I said.

"Look here, d'Escombe," he interrupted quickly, "you're entirely in my hands. You can't hurt me without hurting yourself. And I tell you I can only give you four hundred. We must bring off another *coup* very soon."

"I'm hanged if I do," I answered angrily. "I've done with you," and I rose.

"Don't be in a hurry," came the answer, suave and quiet. "Come over to me later on, and let's talk it over in peace."

"Very well, I will," and I think I shut up my mouth with a vicious snap. I was exceedingly cross and disappointed, and with a casual *au revoir*, left my guest to himself.

Now I had fortunately made one friend during my fortnight's stay at Monte Carlo—a young French doctor named Jules Fabris, who was studying medicine, and particularly bacteriology, in various capitals of Europe. On several occasions I had joined him at the big laboratory attached to the hospital, down in Monaco, and watched him at work with cultures, bacteria and germs of all sorts and

varieties, from complete innocence to savage malignancy.

I strolled round to see him after Featherson had left me.

"Hullo, my dear friend," he greeted me with joy, shaking my hand. "Come and see the lance-shaped diplococcus; it's almost new to me." He knew that as a student I was interested, for I had studied several text-books on the subject, notably Muir and Ritchie's. A few minutes later I applied my eye to the microscope, and watched the little pairs of cocci under the cover-glass.

"What are these," I inquired with curiosity.

"Very deadly! Oh, very, very deadly," was the reply. "The pneumococcus, the germ of pneumonia, and incidentally of many other causes of rapid death."

The short lecture he then gave me imbued me with a great respect for the tiny little objects I could see so distinctly.

Later that night I had a stormy interview with Featherson, and though I left him with a gay *bon soir* my heart was full of thoughts of revenge. He was simply using me as a cat's-paw and taking all the prizes himself.

I could not, as I had dreamt of doing, go back to London, get qualified, and commence

in honest practice. I wanted, at the very least, a thousand pounds. But nothing would move him. Entreaties and threats were alike useless. Next morning when I saw him walking on the terrace of the Casino he was wearing one of those ugly black respirators which are so often used by invalids—or pseudo-invalids—on the Riviera. It suited him apparently, just at that time, to pose as one. I passed him by with a cold casual nod.

Two minutes later, there suddenly came into my mind the idea which was to free me from his slavery and give me a fair start in life.

Why not utilize some of my friend's cultures, and use the respirator as a vehicle?

I knew a good deal of medicine of course, and I felt certain that if Horatio Augustus Featherson got pneumonia his chances of life were small, seeing that he was not a young man and had led a hard, dissipated life. But, conversely, my chances of money-making were big. I should certainly pose as his friend if he were laid up, and I should have very bad luck if I did not obtain a good picking. I knew that he always kept his money upon him, generally in notes.

This, then, was to be the real parting of the ways for me. I had either to cave in, and

simply continue to act as an assistant to a selfish and unscrupulous blackguard who evidently did not intend that I should get out of his clutches, or I had—the word must be faced, Laurence—to murder him!

My transient infatuation for Ella had long ago disappeared, and the death of her father would be no great loss to her.

Yes, I decided to do it. It was the only way!

So I took a stroll in the sunshine and thought out my method of procedure. I should have no difficulty in getting a cultivation of the diplococcus. There were several in my friend's laboratory, and I had the free run of that. But I must make an opportunity to inoculate the respirator.

I started next day by calling on Featherson at his hotel.

"I am sorry," I said, with an appearance of contrition, "that I so foolishly lost my temper yesterday. I hope you'll shake hands over it all, and we can then be friends once more."

"Jolly glad to do so, my boy," said the old reprobate with the hearty laugh which he could produce at will: "I feel certain that we thieves cannot afford to fall out. Now

we'll set to work on a new *coup*, and then perhaps you'll be able to get a bigger percentage. You must see that, so far, I've worked everything, and therefore I ought to take the lion's share of the profits—eh?"

He did not mention that if we'd been caught the balance on the other side would have been fairly equally distributed.

He was in his bedroom in a brocaded dressing-gown when I saw him, and, keeping my eyes open, I soon noticed the ugly black respirator lying on his dressing-table.

When could I get at it, I wondered. It was not an easy matter. Neither was the transmission of the deadly bacteria; and when I left him, having promised to dine with him that evening, I was still turning over in my mind how best to get to work.

He was wearing the object of my thoughts late that afternoon while we strolled along the terrace of the Casino by the sea, and I, carefully watching, saw him put it in a little case, which he placed in his coat-pocket as, later on, he entered the atrium of the Casino.

The brilliant surroundings, the red-coated Roumanian band across at the Café de Paris, the host of smart, well-dressed folk by whom I was surrounded, had no interest for me that

evening. My mind had but one objective—that respirator.

How was I to get hold of it without his knowledge? Only a few moments were needed to introduce the deadly germs of pneumonia into it, and then, once he had inhaled a breath, the affair was finished.

I decided to try next day. I dare not delay.

He might leave at any day, at any hour, and certainly I could not carry such savage and death-dealing organisms about with me indefinitely. No, I had to manage it somehow immediately, and so determined was I that I paid a visit to the laboratory next afternoon, knowing that my friend Fabris was otherwise engaged. I took away one of the eight small culture-tubes labelled "*diplococcus lanceolatus*," and I assure you that when I placed it, carefully wrapped in a roll of lint which I had brought with me, within my waistcoat pocket, I longed most heartily to have an early opportunity of dispensing with it.

What if someone jostled me heavily, or I fell—or any one of the many small possible accidents occurred? Then I myself stood a great chance of inhaling, or becoming inoculated on my clothes or hands with this particularly virulent germ.

However, the risk had to be taken. Moreover, I had to dispose of the parcel in one of the small pockets of my dress-clothes. This was worse still, but I was desperate, and took my chance.

I reached his hotel early with the idea of seeing my quarry in his bedroom again. My only chance was during his change of clothes, and I timed it just right. He was carefully tying his black bow over his *piqué* dress shirt as I was shown into his room. I had prepared my story.

"I intended to wait for you below, Feather-son," I explained. "But, do you know, I am afraid that fellow Rowe is downstairs. I am almost certain it was he I saw, sitting in the corner of the lounge under a big palm, disguised with a beard. I thought it would be wise if you were to reconnoitre before we went down, eh?"

"By Jove!" ejaculated the old sinner, "I sincerely hope it isn't, but I'll go and see. I can have a good look from the top of the stairs." And he hurriedly put on his coat. "Wait here a minute for me; I can spot him, however he's faked up."

He hurried off, and the next moment saw me draw from the side pocket of his recently

discarded coat the small case containing the respirator.

Two seconds more, and I was sprinkling the inside of it with the culture-fluid, my heart meanwhile thumping away and my hands shaking.

It was done. I replaced the inoculated death-trap in its case, and then back to the coat pocket, when suddenly a knock came at the door, and in walked a waiter. My heart leaped into my throat, and a curious feeling came into the pit of my stomach.

"Monsieur Featherson?" he queried, looking at me, as I thought, rather strangely.

"He's just gone out," I answered in a shaky voice, and as I spoke the culture-tube in my left hand fell to the ground and broke.

I started back. The waiter jumped forward to see what had happened, and then—a lucky stroke of genius, Laurence—a glass of vermouth and soda which my host had been drinking stood on the table at my elbow, and as the waiter stepped up, I upset this also on the same spot as the broken tube. The man looked at me reproachfully, yet with wonder in his eyes.

"M'sieur has broken something?"

"Nothing important," I replied in French. "But you might just clear up the mess, will you, waiter? I have broken a little bottle of mine and the glass of vermouth too. I'm sorry to trouble you. Mr. Featherson will be back in a minute if you wish to see him," and I gave him half a louis.

The man left and returned very quickly, but he was still sweeping up the débris as the tenant of the room came back.

"Hullo, what's happened?" he queried.

"Oh, nothing, except I've spilled your drink, but that can soon be remedied. Bring another—no; bring two vermouth and sodas," I ordered the waiter as he, poor devil, took out his dustpan with its deadly contents.

All this time I felt very nervous. Would the young Frenchman say anything? What would happen to others who came into contact with the tens of thousands of pneumonia germs now set free in the house?

These were ugly questions.

"I couldn't see any sign of the chap, d'Escombe. I expect you were mistaken. You're young at the game yet," laughed my companion. "Anyway we'll risk it, and have some dinner. Over at the 'Paris' is best, perhaps—or *Ciro's*. How the dickens did you manage

to make this infernal mess?" he continued, looking at the carpet.

"A mere accident. I'm sorry," I said. "Let's have our drinks over at the café; we can keep our eyes open for awhile if he really is about."

"All right," said he, and meeting the waiter he instructed him accordingly.

Featherson was very agreeable that night, and we both of us made a little money at roulette. As we parted, after the Casino closed, he said, "We shall get on very well together, boy. I'll play the game by you. You see."

I wish he hadn't said that.

Next day I went over to the laboratory to see Dr. Fabris. He was attending to his cultures and had not missed the tube I had taken. Later I went over to Nice with him and we were persuaded to stay the night with his acquaintances who lived up at Cimiez, and also the following day, so I did not see Featherson until the third day after I had used the diplococcus.

When I did call in the afternoon I detected a change in him. He was flushed, which was very rare with him, and his eyes shone bright and restless.

I knew the signs—the pneumococcus had

not failed, and sure enough late that evening I was telephoned for to go to the hotel.

"M'sieur's friend is far from well, I fear," the hotel manager informed me as I entered. "He wishes to see you."

I went up, and found a doctor there. The patient was tossing about in bed with a nasty little hacking cough and was short of breath.

"I'm bad, boy," he said. "Devilish queer. God knows what's the matter. You'll keep an eye on me, won't you? I'm very much alone, old chap, if anything's wrong," and his voice broke. It was the first time he had ever shown me any emotion. I think he knew he was very ill.

"Serious case, m'sieur," the French doctor told me afterwards downstairs, "and curiously enough I have got another patient here—a waiter—just the same thing, an acute form of pneumonia, I fear. I hope not of an infectious nature. If it is, *mon Dieu!* everybody in the hotel may be affected. Be very careful yourself when you're in his room," he urged.

It had not struck me before that I might start a series of infectious cases, and the thought gave me a queer turn. It was more than I had bargained for. I was young then. But that feeling very soon wore off.

Well, to cut a long story short, I went back next day and found the invalid delirious, and as a nurse had been obtained, I had to send her out of the room on a fictitious errand, telling her that I was a medical man. Then I proceeded to make a hurried search for Featherson's note-case, which I ultimately found beneath his pillow. I knew I ran an awful risk of infection, but had again to take that.

I was disappointed to discover only two thousand pounds in paper, out of which I pocketed sixteen hundred, and replaced the rest. It would not have done to leave him without a fair supply—otherwise suspicion might have arisen.

Well, he died, and the waiter died, and afterwards two more of the hotel-servants. It was a sad affair for the proprietor, as all the guests left hurriedly. I frankly admit that, once having obtained the money, I did not run much risk of infection myself, but as Featherson never recovered actual consciousness it was no hardship to him.

I somehow, nevertheless, felt that I should have liked to have soothed his last days. The old blackguard had his good points.

I sent all he had left, in the way of money

and effects, to Ella, and wrote her a long letter saying how very sorry I was—and how I wished I could have done more for him.

That affair completed, I returned to England, having actually avoided the temptation to increase my capital at the tables. I very soon started my medical curriculum—with what result I will, later on, confess to you.

The pneumococcus is a very efficient and valuable weapon; but it is extremely hard to control its actions or its ravages, exhibiting, as it does, so many and varied forms of attack.

I have had cause to use it on one other occasion, which, perhaps, my dear fellow, I will in due course relate to you.

Poor old Featherson! I'm sorry, in a way—even now.

CHAPTER II

IN WHICH A LADY IS CONCERNED

PERHAPS the strange sequence of events which occurred in a country-house, where I was a guest about six months before I got qualified, first put into my mind the enormous possibilities of crime that a thorough knowledge of toxicology placed in the hands of a medical man who did not possess any so-called morals—or a conscience.

It is a rather queer story, my dear old fellow, and I will tell it you as I gleaned it, after having gathered together all the threads of the tangle.

I had gone to stay with a comparatively new friend, with whom I became acquainted in none too savoury surroundings in London, a fellow, younger than myself, named Anthony Laurence, and who lived with his people at Mallowfield Court, ten miles from York. His father, Sir Geoffrey Laurence, resided there with his second wife. My friend was her son—a youngster of

twenty, who was too lazy to take up even the easy profession of arms, which his half-brother Francis, the heir to the estate, had done.

Francis did not get on at all well with his step-mother, who, as I afterwards discovered, was an Argentine lady, and whose son Anthony had inherited from her the tendency to idleness and the love of ease and comfort, which is common to that curious mixture of European and native American nationalities called the *Argentino*.

Francis—who was at Aldershot—under these conditions went home but seldom, fond as he was of his father, leaving, therefore, his step-mother and her son a free “run” of the family estate.

I cannot say that I was personally struck with Master Anthony, but even in those days I had a keen eye to the main chance, and when he invited me to Yorkshire to stay with his people, I accepted, not knowing at the time, however, how matters stood with the family.

Francis, I learnt, had a good allowance from his father, and the want of money had never troubled him. As a matter of fact, I found out that he was a particularly clean-living young man—the society of women he had never cultivated, and he was looked upon by match-making parents as a hopeless bachelor.

Two days after I arrived at Mallowfield a great disaster happened. Sir Geoffrey became suddenly ill at dinner, and the fussy little family medico diagnosed that he had been attacked by an apoplectic seizure. Consequently, Francis was wired for next morning, and arrived about six o'clock on the same evening.

I was in the hall when he arrived, and saw his step-mother—a sly, dark, beautifully-formed woman who did not look her forty-five years—meet the young lieutenant at the door of his home.

He shook hands with her and immediately inquired after his father.

“He had a stroke last night,” she answered, “and Dr. Shaw-Lathome fears that he will not recover. Poor Frank, I am so bitterly grieved.” And her handkerchief went up to her eyes.

“May I go up and see him?” asked Francis in a cold, unemotional voice. I found out later that the presence of his stepmother always made him show the worst side of his character.

“Certainly, if you wish,” she replied. “We have got a nurse—a very good one.”

He went upstairs, and the nurse admitted him to have, as it turned out, his last look at his unconscious father.

Meanwhile—you understand, of course, that

I gathered all these facts later—his step-mother retired to her cosy little boudoir, in which, lounging in an easy chair, she found her son Anthony.

He was a pleasant-looking youth, of small build and stature, with large dark eyes, clean-cut thin features and black hair, which he had inherited from his mother.

"Francis is here," she said. "My poor Anthony, you will soon be almost a beggar. Sir Geoffrey has, as you know, left everything to him, with the exception of a life-income to me and a miserable pittance to you. Oh, what an injustice, and a shame!—to a lout like that—it maddens me, Anthony!"

"But why, mother?"

"The will is this: if Francis survives his father practically everything is his, to do as he likes with—and we must go. You know he hates me! But if your half-brother died first, Anthony, the estate would be yours."

"That's no good to me, mother," answered the young man. "Francis is as strong as a horse, so it's evidently settled. Poor father can't live long, but I'll talk to old Frank to-night, and see what he'll do for me. I can't work, and he knows it. Oh! he'll see me put all right. He must help me."

His mother smiled bitterly. "Yes, you're to be a pensioner, on your good behaviour, and perhaps allowed to see your mother once a year, or something like that. I know he hates me, and I hate him. Ah, how I hate him and his cold English ways!"

"I'll try anyway, later on," replied her son. "He's not so bad, mother, you know. It's only his way."

"His way!" she was interrupted by the entrance of the elder son at that moment.

"I'm afraid it's all over with the poor old guv'nor," he said in a shaky voice. "Both Shaw-Lathome and the London man say there's no hope." His face was white, and his lips trembled—he was very fond of his father. "Where am I to sleep to-night?" he continued, looking at his step-mother.

"In the tower-room, Francis, if that will suit you," she answered. "It's nice and quiet, and has its own staircase—so you will not be interrupted."

"Thanks, that will do for me very nicely. I shall go there early, as I may be called up during the night," the young officer replied. "Who knows?"

"You'll have something to eat, Francis?"

"Thank you, I suppose one must eat how-

ever bad things are ; but I'll go to the 'den' first, and smoke a pipe."

"And I'll go and see that your room is comfortable and ready for you," said the lady. As she left the room, her mouth was shut tight and her hands clenched.

Francis, having sought his room early, was joined at midnight by his half-brother, who went, as he told his mother, to ask for help in the future.

The man-servant Roberts, who took whisky and soda up to the room, noticed that the two young men were excited, and he heard high words between them as he left.

About four o'clock that same morning, the servant, who was sitting up waiting for possible contingencies, was summoned by the nurse to go and fetch the lieutenant as his father had just died suddenly, and at the same time another man was called up to go and wake the doctor, who was sleeping in the house, and other members of the family.

Scarcely a few moments had passed before the man Roberts came rushing back, his eyes almost starting out of his head, his knees shaking under him, his mouth twitching.

"Mr. Francis——" he gasped out jerkily, almost in a whisper, "dead—dead in his bed,

all screwed up and convulsed! and horrible—awful——” Words failed him, he seemed to be struck dumb with horror.

The nurse—a capable woman—took him by the shoulders and shook him. At that moment Dr. Shaw-Lathome arrived, followed almost immediately by myself. We had occupied adjoining rooms. He was a little, fat, fussy man, with gold eye-glasses and short, bristly grey hair—you know the type, old chap.

“What’s this I hear?” he inquired.

“Sir Geoffrey has just died suddenly, doctor,” answered the nurse. “But this man whom I sent to fetch Lieutenant Laurence says that *he* is dead also—or if not, convulsed and seriously ill. There is evidently something horrible the matter. Will you see? You can do nothing for Sir Geoffrey himself, and this man”—nodding towards the shivering Roberts—“is useless.”

“Eh, what?—young Francis dead? What do you mean?” inquired the medico, looking severely at the servant.

“He is dead in his bed, sir,” repeated the frightened man. “Come with me, and I’ll show you the room—in the tower—but I won’t go in again, sir, no—not for a thousand pounds—awful—awful——”

“Go on, then,” ordered Dr. Lathome; and turning to me, “Mr. d’Escombe, you’re in the profession, will you come with me?”

We followed the servant down the fine staircase, into the big hall, along a corridor, and thence up a narrow, winding stairway, evidently built into a circular tower. The man pointed to a door at the top, and then turned and hurried away. He was half crazy with fright.

The doctor knocked at the door, but getting no answer, opened it, and we both entered, to start back aghast.

The man was right—the sight that had met his eye was enough to terrify stronger men than he. On the bed, curled and curved into the most extraordinary and unnatural position, was the body of the handsome and well-set-up young officer who had arrived but a few hours before.

His face, half buried in a pillow, was almost black, his eyes stared wide open, but showed little except the white conjunctivæ, and his tongue—half bitten through—protruded from his mouth. His hands were clenched, the nails driven deep into the skin, and his back was curved like a bow. Even the toes themselves were doubled up close to the soles of his

purple feet. The sight was a terrible one even to the medical eye. Every portion of the unfortunate young man was in a condition of extreme muscular spasm.

"There is no doubt that he is dead, poor chap," said my companion; "and it looks like poison—perhaps strychnine! Look about you, Mr. d'Escombe; but don't touch or move anything. We must send for the police at once."

We made a careful but superficial examination of the body, and looked closely for anything, either in the shape of a bottle or glass, which could have contained the fatal dose. But we found nothing.

"We can do no more at present," declared the doctor, before many minutes were over; and as we left the room and its horrors, he carefully locked the door and took the key, which he found on the inside of the lock.

We then went to the bedroom of the dead baronet. I followed, although it was nothing really to do with me, meeting on the way the still half-dazed Roberts, whom we had sent to the police-station.

The lady of the house, subdued and tearful, met us as we entered. Her son was behind her, looking anxious and distraught.

"Oh, doctor, what has happened?" she asked, sobbing volubly.

"A very terrible affair, my dear lady," he answered, recovering his professional manner. "In addition to the death of your husband, which, of course, we expected, I am grieved to tell you that Mr. Francis has come to a terrible end. He is dead too."

Lady Laurence gave a scream, and collapsed, moaning, on a chair, but Anthony stepped forward, his face working convulsively. "What, Francis dead! It's not true, doctor; is it, d'Escombe?" appealing to me. I could see real misery in his eyes. "Say it's not true—tell me, old man."

"It is, Anthony, only too true," I replied, wondering somewhat at his extreme agitation, knowing, as I did, that he and his half-brother were not the closest of friends. "And I fear also that it is not a case of natural death," I added.

"Not natural," he half whispered in a husky tone. "Why—why—what do you mean, Archie? Suicide or——?" He feared to continue.

"We know nothing yet; the police have been sent for and the room is locked," I told him. "But, buck up, man, you must face

the music. You are the head of the family now."

"The head of the family," he repeated under his breath, and glanced furtively at his mother, who, attended by the nurse, still lay faint and pale on the couch to which she had been carried.

I must say that some suspicion of foul play came into my mind. Had Anthony anything to do with the death of the young man upstairs?

The household was by this time in a state of panic. Servants stood here and there in twos and threes, whispering in awe-struck tones. No one seemed to know what to do; but just at this moment a police-sergeant, followed by a constable, was announced by the man Roberts.

"Lady Laurence is too ill to see anyone," answered Dr. Shaw-Lathome, who, in lieu of anyone more competent, had to take charge of affairs. "I will see the sergeant at once." He turned to me once again, as if in need of help. "Will you come with me again, Mr. d'Escombe?" he said. "I am the police-surgeon, and shall have to take this case over at first, any way."

"I'll be pleased to help in any manner I can," I answered, and turned to leave the

room, glancing for the moment at Anthony, who was still standing near his mother with an expression on his face which I could not understand—it was a mixture of fear and fright, and yet somehow he had not the crushed look of a guilty man.

We conducted the officer to the tower-room, and the horrible scene.

Dr. Lathome then pointed out to the police the attitude of the body, and also showed two very dark livid marks, one on each side of the dead man's throat—thumb marks apparently, he said.

The sergeant's eyebrows lifted. "Violence," he commented.

"It looks like it," said the surgeon, "but we must have some further medical help."

"And official," chimed in the officer. "We had better send at once." And he gave the constable some instructions.

On the following day an inquest on the body of Lieutenant Laurence was held, and at the end of it Anthony Laurence, my friend and host, was arrested for the murder of his half-brother.

The evidence was stronger than I had imagined. It was proved that the two young men had quarrelled. Roberts was positive as

to that. It also appeared to be quite certain that no one could possibly have visited the dead man on that evening but his half-brother, as in order to reach the tower-room it was necessary to pass through the hall, and that had not been empty for a moment during the few hours before the death.

Anthony, in his evidence, volunteered the statement that he and Francis had quarrelled, and admitted also that the marks on the throat were probably his handiwork, the two having come to blows. "But," he said, "Francis was stronger than I, and although I held him by the throat for a very short time he afterwards threw me out of the room and shut the door. What I did was really done in self-defence."

He swore that he left deceased about one o'clock, very angry, but in perfect health as far as he knew, and that he had then gone to his own room.

There was no evidence to support him, however, as to the time, although Roberts admitted seeing him pass through the hall "very late."

The medical evidence was very curious, and to me, my dear fellow, most interesting and instructive.

"Death," said Professor Hughes, the expert called in, "resulted from asphyxia, and might have been caused by strangulation, and the thumb marks on the throat were extremely suspicious."

Then he went on :

"The general condition, position and appearance of the body was unnatural to a degree, and it seems to me that some other factor beside the compression of the throat should be taken into consideration, although so far we have no evidence whatever of poison. *Rigor mortis*—stiffening—had set in early in the morning, putting the time of death at eleven o'clock at the latest, under normal conditions, and yet at twelve-thirty the man-servant swears that he saw deceased alive and apparently in robust health. The post-mortem examination reveals nothing, although further research as to the presence of poison will be undertaken."

Under the circumstances the police had no option but to arrest Anthony and detain him on suspicion, pending a further inquiry.

Lady Laurence was exceedingly upset over this result. She cried continuously and refused to eat, or talk, or see anybody, even though the doctor pointed out to her that the

evidence was not strong enough to convict her son.

“My poor boy, my poor boy! What shall I do! Whatever shall I do!” she wailed continuously, and constant nursing and attention was necessary for her.

The late baronet’s will, as she told her son, left everything, except her jointure, to him, if the elder son, Francis, died before his father, and without a legitimate heir. But the question immediately arose, which of them did die first? There was no definite evidence to show this, and this proved to be another factor in producing the lamentable mental and physical condition of Lady Laurence a few days after the tragedy.

My friend Anthony was eventually brought before the magistrate and charged with murder.

Counsel defending him seemed to me to be singularly incapable, and but for my prompting from the seat I had secured behind him, I believe he would have allowed the case to proceed without even pointing out what a sad mistake was being made, and how flimsy the evidence was against the man charged. Yet I had, at the back of my mind, the idea—call it intuition if you like—that Anthony was not keen on making a defence, though I felt certain

that when the case came before a judge—if it did—that Anthony was safe, although the evidence against him in some directions was very strong.

“Who else,” argued the prosecution, “could have done it? It is evident that the deceased had only the one visitor that night, and with him a quarrel was admitted.” Motive also was adduced, and in the end my young friend was committed for trial. I obtained permission to see him on two occasions while he was in prison, but could get practically no information from him.

“You know, Archie, that I didn’t do it,” he said sadly. He seemed miserably depressed, and no wonder! “And I know nothing about it, but I can see that there is a lot of evidence against me. We did have a row that night. I asked him to give me a decent income—told him that he ought to do so, and he rounded on me, saying that I was a lazy young devil, that he wouldn’t encourage me, but that if I would show any inclination to do work of some kind or another that he would then help me. I got angry, and my mother’s name cropped up—that started the fuss. He said she was a designing woman and hated him, and I stood up for her, and after—well, you’ve

heard—I was chucked out. I hadn't a chance against Francis."

"I believe you, Anthony," I answered. "And I'll do all I can to help you, but—who killed him? I feel certain it was not suicide."

The youngster said nothing—and again I felt that he knew, or suspected more than he could tell.

Who else was there, I asked myself, except his mother, Lady Laurence. She had certainly not visited the dead lieutenant after he went to the tower-room. The mystery was inscrutable—every track ended, as it were, in a blind alley.

Anthony asked me to stay at the house for a time and help his mother in her loneliness; for she, poor soul, was a stranger in the land, and the neighbourhood left her severely alone.

Lady Laurence, however, in a few days' time recovered from her severe prostration up to a point, but she sat, silent and wretched, day after day in her boudoir, saying nothing—but thinking all the time of her son in his prison cell.

Meanwhile I was not idle, and as the day for the trial at the Assizes at York approached I began to feel more hopeful.

"I think we shall clear him all right," I

told the widow two days before the case was likely to come off. "I have not drawn altogether blank." As a matter of fact I suspected the employment of a hypodermic syringe as the means by which poison had been given.

She stared at me, with a terrified expression, as it appeared to my mind, but said nothing.

On the following day we took rooms at the Station Hotel at York. During the evening Lady Laurence was startled by her maid, who came into her sitting-room and said, "Mrs. Laurence to see you, m' lady; shall I show her in?"

"Mrs. Laurence," repeated her ladyship. "Mrs. Laurence, who can she be? Yes, show her in, please—if she is respectable."

"Oh, quite, m' lady," replied the girl, and in a few moments she ushered in a tall, slim young woman, dressed neatly in a well-fitting black gown.

"Pardon my intrusion," said the visitor, in a soft, pleasant voice; "but I have been ill, and have only been able to leave my room for the first time to-day, after nearly a month in bed, during which time I was not allowed to read or write. I only learned yesterday about my poor Francis." There the girl

broke down, and cried as if her heart would break.

Lady Laurence looked on astounded, wondering what on earth the girl meant, but did not attempt to move—did not even suggest a chair to her visitor.

The girl, however, soon recovered her self-control, and continued:

“Poor dear Francis. He would never let me write to you or tell you.”

“What do you mean?” inquired Lady Laurence, but I feel sure her heart sank with a premonition of trouble in store. “Poor Francis?—to whom do you refer?”

The girl—she was very young—threw up her head on hearing the hard tone of voice.

“I refer to my late husband—Lieutenant Francis Laurence,” she replied in a steady voice.

“Your husband?” The elder woman could hardly trust her voice, it seemed to be lost. “Why—why—Francis was not married?”

“Pardon me, but he was,” answered the visitor. “And, moreover, we have a little boy three months old; it was about him, in particular, that I came to see you.”

The elder woman looked at the speaker with blank amazement in her face, and at the same

time an expression of mingled horror and despair was apparent.

"Francis married! A son! Impossible—it can't be true!" she gasped out, as she sank back on her couch.

"It is true, Lady Laurence," replied the young lady; "and I am anxious to know how my son is situated by the death of his father and grandfather?"

Lady Laurence stood up, looked at her visitor for a moment with widely dilated eyes and a ghastly, bluish-white face, and then dropped on the floor, senseless.

She was carried to bed, and I, having been hurriedly summoned, managed to obtain the same nurse who had attended to her husband, to look after her. I also sent for a medical man.

Then I took charge of the visitor, and learnt from her all I have just told you.

The sick woman, during the night, began to ramble and talk incoherently, with occasional lucid intervals, but her mind had apparently given way; why, it was hard to tell.

The nurse, after awhile, sent for me. "You must come and listen to her," she said. "She talks about the most awful things. What is curare?"

Then, Brown, the light suddenly dawned upon me. I was a theoretical student of toxicology, and knew as much about poison, and more, than most men. My thoughts at once went back to that gruesome, unnatural figure on the bed in the tower-room. Francis had died of poison—and that poison was undoubtedly curare!

"Phew! What a fool I was not to think of it before," I said to myself. "I can see it all now."

"Does she talk of curare?" I inquired.

"She speaks of little else at present," replied the nurse. "Curare, poison, death, convulsions, needles—her mind seems to run in a circle."

"Needles," I repeated. "Needles!" and then went with the nurse and listened outside the door of the sick room.

Next morning I went by the first train back to the Laurences' house, and at once made my way to the tower-room, which had been left entirely undisturbed since the young fellow's horrible death.

First I carefully examined the sofa-couch at the foot of the bed; there was only one cushion on this, and that I left alone. Next, the big padded easy chair had to be over-

hauled, and I poked about these two articles of furniture with a stick I carried with me very carefully, and very closely, but no one accompanying me would have understood my movements. However, I found nothing and turned my attention to the bed, still rumpled and upset, and at last wrapping my hand in my handkerchief, and on the top of that a small towel, I started to prod and push about the pillows.

I had been at this work from the start about three hours before I gave a sudden jump, and looked anxiously at the palm of my hand, and I admit I felt a sudden sensation of deadly fear, carefully as I had protected myself. After that, if you had watched me, you would have seen me very slowly and with infinite care draw from the pillow I last examined a pin—a thing six inches long—which I could not get entirely away until, with my pocket scissors, I had cut the linen cover. Then I held very gingerly in my fingers one of those long pins used by ladies with a round black head, the point of which appeared to be rusty, and which had evidently been sewn into the pillow itself.

The mystery was solved! Poor unsuspecting Francis had laid his head down on this death-

trap, the point of the poisoned pin had scratched him, and death, horrible and rapid, had supervened. That was the end of him.

The whole story was now clear. A mother, jealous, vindictive and greedy for wealth; a mother who loved her own son and hated her husband's child had brought this about—and, I felt sure, a son who suspected his mother.

I pictured her that night when Francis arrived, desperate and half-insane, going to the tower-room with this pin, its point prepared with the curare poison, and sewing it into the pillow, feeling sure that the young officer would die before his father, and that her son would become Sir Anthony Laurence.

How frightful must have been her feelings when her son was arrested for her crime. Again, how harried her conscience when the question arose as to which of the twain had died first, and finally, how hopeless and useless her dreadful crime, when she found out that there was another heir to the property and title.

No wonder that her nervous system had given way; but I very much doubt if the cause of the death of Francis Laurence would ever have been elucidated unless the word curare had dropped from her lips in delirium.

When I returned that night she was still as bad as ever, and, as a matter of fact, was removed to the York County Asylum within the next few days and soon afterwards died therein.

She was certainly a clever woman, and had probably some considerable knowledge of the poisons of her native land. I think I told you she was a South American, and it was, of course, from there that she brought her supply of curare, which is certainly a most deadly and efficacious poison, and one which, if introduced into the blood stream in the proper way, leaves no trace for the post-mortem examiner—as this case ultimately proved.

The medical evidence from start to finish was of no value, except as to its false premises; the very early onset of *rigor mortis* would have given me, in my later days, much information—but I was young and inexperienced then.

I saw the chief constable, and told him what I had found in the pillow, but taking all the facts into consideration he decided to take no further proceedings, seeing that, not only was the unfortunate woman insane, but that also there was no real definite evidence against anyone, although there was no doubt as to what had happened.

Anthony was brought up for trial, but at the Assizes the grand jury did not return a true bill against him, and consequently nothing further came out.

The outcome of all this proved my young friend's salvation, as he afterwards took up the profession of the law, and did well. The claims of the small heir were, of course, incontestable, and he is now already promising to become a shining light in the county.

The whole story—and perhaps I have been somewhat verbose—had a considerable effect on my after life, for as I have already said, it showed me very plainly how easy it is to make things appear to be almost the exact antithesis of what they really are.

To my mind, toxicology is the only “ology” worth studying; not only is it fascinating to a degree, but it is valuable—very valuable.

CHAPTER III

IN WHICH I DISCLOSE A SECRET

YOU never imagined, my dear fellow, in all the years of our intimacy, that I was a gigantic fraud—but I propose to show you myself as I really was.

I started earning my own living as an indoor assistant to a Dr. Shirley Eckington, who had a poor-class practice in Leeds, receiving eighty pounds a year. I had nothing else but a maximum of assurance and a minimum of morality. My life consisted of much hard work, indoor and out, by day, and cards, billiards and barmaids after my work was finished—that is, as much as a doctor's work is ever finished. But as time went on I began to stay at home at nights, for the reason that I had fallen temporarily in love with the doctor's daughter—a pretty, innocent little girl, who looked after her semi-invalid father

with the greatest care and attention, but who knew little or nothing of the outside world.

Poor little Gwen! I can often see her big blue eyes and golden hair even now; however, that's by the way. Suffice it to say that before long there was a definite understanding between us, but which we kept strictly to ourselves, knowing that we had no immediate prospects of marriage. Her father, Dr. Eckington, was a peculiar man, who had evidently lived a strenuous life, and at the latter end of it was certainly not overburdened with wealth. The practitioner among the poorer classes has generally a hard struggle to pay his way, and he was no exception to the rule; he did not possess the faculty of plausible lying which is so necessary to success in the general practitioner. He suffered with fainting attacks which I regarded as showing heart trouble, but up to a certain evening he had never mentioned his ailments to me; he treated himself. It was after I had been with him for about eight months, and two months after my understanding with Gwen, that he sent for me one evening about eleven o'clock.

"Sit down, Mr. d'Escombe," he said, as he handed me a cigar-case. "Excuse my getting up, but I want to have a chat with you."

"Thank you," I answered, wondering which of my sins he had discovered. "Nothing wrong, I hope?"

"It depends," was his answer. "Have you got any means of your own—except what you earn, I mean?—because, if not, I don't think you have treated either me or my daughter fairly. You can't marry on eighty pounds a year." A grim smile played about his haggard features as he spoke, but he did not appear to be angry.

I confess I was staggered for the moment; he had found out, then, in spite of all our care.

"I—I—what do you mean, sir?" I faltered.

"Oh, I know all about it, my dear sir," he said. "I've not lived all these years and not learnt to keep my eyes open. But to return: Are you now, or likely to be, in a position to marry?"

"I'm afraid not at present," I replied, "but I hope as time goes on to find an opening, and I meant then to speak to you about a formal engagement between Gwen and myself. We are both quite prepared to wait."

"Bah!" sneered the old man. "Find an opening—what kind of an opening, eh? Don't talk nonsense, man."

I'm afraid I had nothing to say, and after a few minutes' silence, he continued, leaning forward and looking me straight in the face: "Now listen to me. I am a poor man, and I haven't very long to live—but even that is too long."

"Too long, Dr. Eckington? What do you mean?" I inquired, in astonishment.

"This," said he. "If I shuffle off this mortal coil within the next week, Gwen will have five thousand pounds, for which amount my life is insured; but as the premium is due within seven days, and I haven't the necessary money for it, the policy will lapse. My life has been a hard one, my friend, and this insurance is all I have been able to do in the shape of provision for my girl when I'm gone. I've never been able to save a penny beyond this."

"But, my dear sir," I interrupted, "you are good for years yet. Why talk like this?"

"Not for years, d'Escombe," he answered, with a sad smile. "Just listen here." He tapped his chest, and I was surprised to find how very badly diseased his heart was. "You see how it is," he continued. "I can't hold out much longer. Why prolong the agony and leave the girl penniless? No; you and

she can marry, you can buy a practice, and I shall die satisfied—but it *must be this week*.”

“What do you mean?” I queried.

“Mean,” said he, “mean—why, I intend that you shall help me. A little digitalin, followed by some morphia, a hypodermic syringe—and all is settled. You can sign the certificate, and Gwen—bless her heart!—gets the money. But not a word to *her*, mind. She must never know.”

I sat aghast. It was a remarkable suggestion, a man quietly asking me to murder him. It took my breath away for the minute, and yet, it was easy enough, too, when one came to think of it.

“You are not in earnest, Dr. Eckington?” I said. “I can’t kill you in cold blood like this—it’s too preposterous.”

“Nothing of the sort, man,” replied the doctor. “I am in deadly earnest, and to-morrow I shall take to my bed. You can give me the first dose in the evening.”

“I can’t do it, sir,” I protested. “Besides, it might be discovered, and then——”

“Nonsense! You are quite safe. Anyway, choose, and choose now—either a new berth as an underpaid assistant, or wife, money, and a practice.”

To cut it short, I consented, and next evening, when he sent Gwen for me to go to his bedroom, I gave him his first dose of digitalin, which was to initiate his final illness.

For the next two or three days I hardly dared look Gwen in the face. Poor little girl, she was very distressed over her father, and I was genuinely fond of her—for the time being.

"Is he very ill, Archie dear?" she often inquired. "He *is* going to get better, isn't he?"

"Yes, darling. He is very bad, but we must always be hopeful," I would say, feeling, I must admit, an awful blackguard. I was a bit thin-skinned still, but it wore off, as you will read later.

On the fourth night, when I visited my patient, he said: "D'Escombe, this must come to an end. I can't stand much more of it; but make it as sharp and sudden as you can, my boy. I'm very tired of it"—and I fancy I saw tears come into his eyes. "I can't do any more for my little girl than this, and I thank you for helping me; but God's curse on you if you don't treat her well after I'm gone. You promise, eh? You'll not fail me?"

"Of course, sir, of course I will," I answered. "I love her very dearly, and will do all I can to make her happy."

"And she is never to know—how I died?"

"Never, I promise you most faithfully."

"Now, don't forget the morphia whenever I send for you. Give me an extra dose of the other now, and then send Gwen to me. Perhaps I shall see you again to-night."

Ominous words. I went back to the surgery, and thought it over, and as the hours passed the waiting actually made me feel nervous. I had three strong whiskies and sodas—rare for me—but even then by midnight I was ready to start at the slightest noise, and felt generally all to bits. "This won't do," I thought. "Buck up, old man," and just then I heard a swish of garments, and in rushed Gwen in a dressing-gown, bare-footed and dishevelled.

"Oh, Archie, Archie, come quick. I think father's dying, please," and her voice broke into a terrified sob. I snatched up my hypodermic case and ran upstairs, Gwen following. Eckington looked ghastly. His breathing was laboured, and he appeared to be very ill—much worse than he really was, but he was evidently suffering great pain. "Now—now," he whispered, as I sent Gwen away to fetch

something, "the morphia, quick." Even then he could have been saved, and I'm not sure that the wistful look in his eyes didn't mean, "You needn't if you don't want to." But I did—I was ready now—and without a handshake I prepared, and gave, the injection.

"I'm going, Gwen," he whispered to her. "Good-bye, my darling, d'Escombe will help you."

He glanced at me with rapidly contracting pupils, the weeping girl kneeling by his bedside, convulsively clutching one thin, white hand.

"Good-bye—remember," were the last words I heard before he fell into the stupor from which there was to be no awakening.

We sat with him all night, and in the early morning he died—while the poor little girl sobbed on my shoulder.

I managed to quieten her after a time, and told her that I would attend to everything.

Luckily there were no near relations to come bothering with awkward and inquisitive questions; and everybody knew he had been ailing for some time, so, therefore, no one was surprised to hear of his death. I certified aortic valvular disease, and in due time claimed and got for my *fiancée* the insurance money.

I persuaded her to agree to an early marriage, and then, after some little trouble, bought the Okehampton practice, which, at any rate, to begin with, suited me very well. He was a plucky beggar that Eckington. What do you think, Brown ?

CHAPTER IV

IN WHICH I EARN A BIG FEE

DURING my first two years of practice in Okehampton I worked fairly hard, but only made about eight hundred pounds a year, which was not nearly enough, especially as my tastes and habits became increasingly extravagant.

I wanted good horses, good wine, good cigars, plenty of holidays, and a thousand and one other things and luxuries, which rapidly absorbed more money than I was making.

I cannot imagine any worse feeling than that of an empty pocket to a man who has been accustomed to a full one.

My wife and I had a large circle of acquaintances and kept almost open house to those who liked card-playing.

I was at this time the delight and the "much admired" of ladies, both young and old, for whom I invented ailments, to cure

which I provided necessary medicines and the, to me most essential, resulting accounts.

I was getting very unhappy, however, when one day, much to my gratification, I was called to Scoriton Manor, a fine country residence about five miles distant from our little town, to see the youthful heir to the estate and ten thousand a year.

He was seven years old; his father was dead, and his mother lived at the Manor, which with the whole estate was entailed. His uncle, the next-of-kin, spent most of his time there, and it was through his influence that I was asked to attend the sick boy. He and I had played billiards together at the County Hotel on several occasions, and I might say that he won every time, and, conversely, that I judiciously lost.

Jack Chalmers was a bright, nice little chap, and I did not find much the matter with him, and so I told his mother, at the same time carefully hedging in case anything might develop later. She and I did *not* hit it off; there are some people, the sort you call really honest and straightforward, don't you know, who have a natural antipathy to those who are not of their way of thinking.

Captain Chalmers, the uncle, asked me into

his room to smoke a cigar before I left, and of course inquired after the boy.

"I managed to rush you in here this time, my dear d'Escombe," he said, in his slow, drawling manner, "but I'm doubtful, very doubtful. 'Madam' does not like you, I fear, and is almost sure to find some excuse for sending to London next time. What a pity I'm not Lord of the Manor; I could put plenty of work and good fat fees in your way. *Is* there anything the matter with the boy? His heart quite sound, eh?"

Of course these remarks had the effect they were calculated to have; little Jack Chalmers' death-warrant was signed in the few seconds which passed before I answered.

"I can't say that I should be exactly sorry, don't-yer-know," he continued, and looked very straight at me through his monocle.

Then I started in to prepare my ground. I talked about the hard times, lack of work, shortness of money, and heavy expenses, and ended up by asking the Captain point-blank if he could lend me a hundred pounds for a month.

"My dear boy," he answered, "I wish you could do the same for me."

Oh," I said pointedly, "you and I are in

the same boat and experiencing the same bad financial weather, eh? I suppose if you were to come into the estate you would be glad to lend a helping hand?"

"I should just think so, old chappie; not a paltry hundred, but ten times the amount."

"Or perhaps even more?"

"Yes, perhaps twenty times."

"Is that a promise?"

"Yes, in the very unlikely event of anything happening."

"More unlikely things have happened, Chalmers," I answered with a grin. "Well, good-bye, I shall be up again to-morrow to see how the boy is going on."

I thought furiously as I drove home, and by the time the carriage drew up at my door my plan was decided.

At this particular time I was attending a child who was in the last stage of scarlet fever, the desquamating stage we call it; really a peeling off of innumerable small flaky bits of skin, each of which is capable of giving scarlet fever to someone else.

What was easier than to convey this infection to the boy up at the Manor?

Next day I visited the infectious case first, and whilst examining him, I managed to

scrape off enough of the little fragments of skin under two of my finger-nails to give scarlet fever to twenty children.

I had often manufactured cases, but now two thousand of the "best and brightest" were being dangled cleverly before me.

I had not only to communicate the disease, however, but it was needful also to render it fatal—not such an easy business, yet I could not think of any better plan. You see, such an enormous amount of care was taken to keep the boy from running any risks. He was always carefully watched and guarded.

I drove directly home from the fever case and covered the two infected fingers with rubber points cut from a glove, which could be slipped off under cover of my handkerchief, or even the bed-clothes, if necessary.

I intended to plant my disease-carrying atoms at the moment when I took the boy's temperature, and I was a good deal taken aback to find that since my departure the day previously, Mrs. Chalmers had persuaded a friend of hers, who was a nurse, to pay her a short visit, and help look after Jackie; at the same time, consequently, I found that the temperature had been already taken

Adopting a rather pompous and fussy manner, however, I said that I should prefer to take it again, and walking to the window pretended to be looking at the thermometer, instead of which I was of course removing the rubber nail covers, one of which I was clumsy enough to drop as I returned to the bedside.

I put the thermometer into the boy's mouth with my left hand, making sure that both his lips and tongue touched the two fingers which I had infected.

"You've dropped a rubber finger-cover, doctor," said a soft voice, and turning, I found the nurse holding it out to me, looking meantime with some interest at my hands to see, I supposed, why I needed such protection.

"Thank you, nurse," I said; "I ran a needle into my finger to-day, and I always take great care of my hands."

"How is Jackie this morning, Dr. d'Escombe?" inquired the boy's mother, as I followed her downstairs.

"I don't think that he's quite so well," was my previously thought-out answer. "Although he has not any serious rise of temperature, still there's something I'm not quite satisfied

about—the kind of intuition which we doctors get, you know.”

“Would you like a consultation?” she asked.

“Nonsense, Jane—there’s nothing the matter,” interrupted the drawling voice of the gallant Captain, who had just entered. “You leave d’Escombe to look after the little chap. He’ll be well in a couple of days.”

The lady looked at him, a very straight, almost inquiring look, and I could see by the momentary flash in her eyes and the firmer set of the mouth that she distrusted her relation; perhaps simply because he was the next heir to little Jackie.

“You’ll tell me at once if there’s the slightest danger, won’t you, Dr. d’Escombe?” she said to me, ignoring the Captain’s remark altogether. “He is all I’ve got, and it would break my heart if anything happened to him. I can trust you, can’t I?”

This kind of interview was none too pleasant, and I was glad to get away and drink a large whisky-and-soda with the prospective Lord of the Manor.

“How is he really?” he asked, looking keenly at me.

“I don’t quite know, Chalmers. I shouldn’t

wonder if he were sickening for something," I replied, with a smile.

"Gad, you're a cold-blooded devil!" he blurted out, and then, "I mean all doctors seem to be naturally hard-hearted and unfeeling—eh, what?"

"Not all, not by a long way; some are different. I, personally, practise to make money, not for the sake of curing the sufferer, if that's what you mean."

Next day the boy had a headache, and two days later his temperature jumped up, and when I told his mother she openly deplored the recent death of her regular medical attendant, and practically insisted on a consultation with one of the leading physicians in London.

He came in the evening, but could throw no light on the case; the rash had not yet appeared. Luckily for me he regarded the illness very lightly; but when on the following day the typical red rash did come, and he was again sent for from the hotel, he changed his opinion, and diagnosed a virulent attack of scarlet fever.

"You were right, d'Escombe," the Captain remarked to me later, with a curious look in his eyes.

He knew well enough that the illness was my doing.

The child got rapidly worse, and I must confess that when I went in to see him, and that was several times a day, the sight of his little, red, flushed face, bright, suffused eyes, and pretty, tousled fair hair, made me—even me—feel uncomfortable and anxious to see the finish so that I might get away.

The most searching inquiries failed to discover the source of his infection; nobody, of course, thought of me—nobody ever does suspect the doctor, although Mrs. Chalmers did ask me if I had any scarlet fever cases, to which I said "No."

Despite the most unremitting attention and nursing, the frequent visits of the great man from London, and my constant presence in the house, the boy died on the sixth day; but it is possible that if I had not kept a close watch, he might have recovered.

Captain Chalmers inquired constantly and eagerly after the invalid, and as the days went on his manner to me changed; he became patronizing and arrogant, already seeing himself the possessor of the Manor and its land and income.

Would he pay? That was my worry. I had no means of making him, and if he chose to back out he could.

On the day of little Jackie's death the Captain asked me into his room, and said: "I shall be able to lend you the money we mentioned very shortly, but one thing I insist on, and that is that you never enter this house again; and I should also like to inform you that when I make a new will, your name will not appear, so my death will not advantage you. I thought it would be well to mention it, because it seems to me that you are the sort of man who might act on the chance, and I hope to live for many years yet."

For the moment, I felt like letting him have it straight from the shoulder, but it wouldn't do, and so I answered, smiling:

"You speak in enigmas, Chalmers, but anything to suit you; however, you must not appear any different to me in the town. Then I shall hear from you soon?"

"In a day or two," he replied; and I left the Manor, never to enter it again except on the occasion of poor little Jackie's funeral.

The two thousand came in notes with never a word, and very soon Chalmers appeared to

take an intense dislike to the Manor, and went to live in London, and abroad.

This windfall put me straight for a time, but, as usual, matters came to a bad pass again, not so very long after.

CHAPTER V

IN WHICH MY LOVE-AFFAIR IS EXPLAINED

WHEN I first started in practice, old friend, I made up my mind to pose as a ladies' man, and I certainly earned that reputation among my patients. As a matter of fact I have only once ever really made a fool of myself over a woman, and then unfortunately for her—as she died much earlier in life than appeared to be probable.

I will tell you about it, although I admit that it is a story of which I am not proud, and which I should have kept to myself if I had not decided to let you, old friend, know everything about my life.

I have told you how my marriage came about, and possibly you may have noticed in your many visits to my house at Okehampton that my wife and I were not what you call an affectionate couple. As a matter of fact my youthful infatuation for her wore off within

the first year of our married life, and during the five years which this lasted our relations to each other were cold and frequently strained. She came to look upon me as a hard, calculating man-of-the-world, who had little affection to spare except upon himself, and I think that her very orthodox opinions of right and wrong ultimately made me look upon her as a narrow-minded and distinctly milk-and-water kind of person. Then, at the end of that time, she made a bosom friend of Estelle Martin—a woman slightly older than herself—and with this woman I fell desperately in love.

You will say after reading these papers: “How ridiculous! This man who was selfish to the bone; who stayed his hand at nothing; who killed without scruple, who robbed with joy, this blackguard d’Escombe to fall in love—bosh!”

But it was so. She was a very beautiful woman—stately and calm, with that red-brown hair beloved of the Venetian painters, and the violet eyes and perfect contour of face which you only find in Ireland. So I lost my head completely.

At first she hardly noticed me, although she was constantly in my house, but the time

at last came, after I had exerted every effort, and played every card I knew, that she understood and responded.

I remember it so well.

That evening my wife had gone out visiting and was late in returning, and Estelle and I were sitting in the twilight, waiting. I was ablaze with longing for her, controlling myself with difficulty. She was speaking confidentially about her younger days, and then as she talked I put my hand on hers and she did not take it away. It was all done and over in a second; before I could think I was kissing her madly. I laugh at myself now, but I was in deadly earnest then. "You mustn't—oh! you really must not," I remember her saying, but she returned my kisses, and ten minutes after I left her crying bitterly, but she put on her hat and coat, and got away before my wife came back.

We had many stolen meetings afterwards, but she was always blaming herself for her treachery to "Babs"—my wife's name with her intimates—and try as I would, and I think I was fairly persuasive, I could never make her really responsive, or even kiss me again.

"I will not be such a treacherous beast to her," she would say, "much as I love you, But—if only we had met before."

Well, that's enough of my love-story, my friend; but you can see that I was in that frame of mind which stops at nothing. So at the very first opportunity I could get—it was a post-mortem—I made a virulent culture of some staphylococci, the germs which produce blood-poisoning, and a few days after my wife scratched her hand very badly with an unsuspected pin which lurked in one of her garments, with the result that in about ten days' time she was in bed, attended by a brother practitioner, and being nursed most assiduously by Estelle, who insisted, as she had had some training, on taking the place of a regular nurse.

“Poor dear little Babs,” she said to me one night, as I sat brooding and wondering how things would turn out. “I think she is turning the corner. I am so glad!”

“Glad!” I muttered. “Glad! Estelle darling, come, let us abandon everything, and get away together—to America, Australia—where you will. I can't go on like this.”

Like a silly fool I was quite prepared to give up everything—profession, honour, practice, home—if she would only come with me. But she looked at me with a half frightened air.

“I believe,” she said in a low voice, “I

really believe you would be glad if Babs didn't get better."

"And why not?" I whispered. "I want you, Estelle darling—only you!"

She shivered and drew away from me as she answered: "You will make me hate you, if you talk like that. How can you?" And she went to the sick-room without another word or look.

Well, I have to tell you now I've begun. My wife had to have three minor operations done for the poisoned arm and then began to improve, but slowly, and at the end of a month's illness she was just a shadow of herself, fragile to a degree, in just that condition which only required the smallest "fillip" to turn things the wrong way, and—well—it had to be done.

I wanted Estelle madly, frantically, and while my wife was alive this was impossible, so that night I added enough arsenic to a dose of her medicine to produce a sickness which I felt the invalid would not be likely to stand, and which is a common symptom in such cases as hers.

I felt a bit uncomfortable as I saw the thin, pallid-faced, golden-haired little woman lying in the bed.

"I think I'm getting better—I'm so sorry I've been such a worry to you, Archie. You'll forgive me, won't you, dear?" she half whispered.

"Yes, yes," I muttered, feeling an awful brute for the moment, but Estelle's face came into my mind—curse her—and I decided to carry the thing through.

"What horrid medicine the doctor has sent me," she continued. "I can still feel it burning."

"Oh, that will soon pass off," I answered with a laugh. "Don't get faddy about the physic, and now," I added, as I turned to leave her, "I'll get Miss Martin to come up." And another moment saw me out of that room, which had certainly somewhat jarred on my nerves.

I saw Estelle about two hours later, when she came to tell me that my wife was worse, and was in considerable pain.

"She complains of the medicine which you gave her," she said, looking at me with an expression on her face which made my heart sink, and then suddenly, her eyes flashing, she blurted forth: "You brute, I believe you've poisoned her!"

Perhaps, Brown, for the one time in my

life I was frightened. My words came spasmodically and I knew my lips trembled as I answered her.

"What—*do*—you mean, Estelle dear!—poisoned!—now don't talk such nonsense, there's a good little girl!" I replied, but I fear my tone was not convincing.

"As sure as I stand here," continued the girl, "you shall answer for it if you've done anything wrong to that poor dear upstairs. Oh, I hate you—I hate you, you brute!"

Woman, my dear old friend, passeth all the understanding of man. Here was a girl who, a few hours before, was willing enough to admit that I was the only man she had ever loved, ready now to see me in the hands of the law—aye, and to put me there!

"I am going back to her," she continued, her face still flushed with emotion, "and I've sent for your friend the doctor."

My feelings were far from pleasant, for I knew that if a post-mortem were to be held in the house I should be in a very tight corner.

"Fool I was not to stick to my hypodermic," I thought to myself. "As it is, I'm afraid that my efforts have been in vain. And, in addition, Estelle becomes a stumbling-block."

The imminence of danger acted like a cold-water douche upon my infatuation, to say nothing of the girl's altered attitude.

The position was a most serious one, and had to be faced promptly. My wife grew rapidly worse during the day; nothing would stop the sickness, and my good old medical friend shook his head. "This is the last straw, as it were, d'Escombe," he said to me when he came downstairs. "I'm afraid she can't rally." And as he said it I caught a look on Estelle's face which made me finally decide on carrying out an idea which I had had in my mind for the last hour.

It was quite certain, Laurence, that if my wife died Estelle was dangerous, and her tongue must be silenced. She had slept in my house for several nights and I had noticed that she wore soft felt slippers while on duty upstairs. This fact enabled me to carry out my scheme. I carefully treated two or three flat-headed tacks with a nicotin alkaloid which I had carefully preserved for over twelve months in view of a crisis such as the present, and these tacks I laid carefully between the door of her room and her bed, feeling fairly certain that she would tread upon one of them. The action of this poison

is to produce immediate motor paralysis, that is loss of all power of movement or speech—and if given in a sufficient dose, almost immediate death. I did not want this latter possibility to happen, but I hoped to find her in a state of collapse, apparently from overwork, and thus be able to “take her over” as a patient, and keep that troublesome tongue quiet.

It was a somewhat elaborate plan, but fortunately it succeeded.

My wife got rapidly worse that evening, and Estelle would not even look at or speak to me, and I felt sure that the morning would bring serious trouble, if matters did not arrange themselves as I wished. However, they did. I was called hurriedly from my room by a maid about midnight, who told me that Miss Estelle had fainted in her bedroom, and I rushed up at once and found her lying on the bed, comatose.

“Run for the doctor, Janet,” I said to the maid, and as soon as she had gone I removed the tell-tale nail, which, sure enough, was in the sole of the slipper worn by the girl with whom a few hours before I thought I was madly in love. She was unconscious—the drug had done its work well, and I was enabled to

pick up the other poisoned tacks which were on the floor, before assistance arrived.

"Dear, dear!" said my colleague; "what an unfortunate affair. She has evidently over-worked herself. What shall we do, d'Escombe?"

"Send for a couple of nurses, doctor," I answered, "and I will take this patient off your hands. She looks very ill, I think."

"Yes, I'm afraid she is, and with your poor wife so desperately bad too, I'm sorry for you," he replied.

"We must do the best we can," I said. "But it is unfortunate."

My wife died that night, and Estelle knew nothing of it. I kept her under the influence of nicotin and hyoscin, given hypodermically in carefully graduated doses for several days, and then allowed her to recover movement and semi-consciousness. But I kept her brain clouded and dazed for a long enough period to prevent her thinking clearly of previous happenings.

I then arranged with her widowed mother to get her away to the Continent for a long rest and change, feeling certain that when she did return anything she said would be looked upon as the fancy of a mind affected by illness.

I was quite cured of my infatuation, as you may imagine.

I didn't see Estelle again for six months, and by then the action of the drugs and the course of time caused us to meet simply as old acquaintances, and this only very seldom. But, by Jove! it was very much "touch and go."

The shock and consequent illness was, I fear, the real cause of Estelle's death some twelve months later.

CHAPTER VI

IN WHICH I OBLIGE A LADY

I EXPECT, my dear Laurence, that since our meeting, several years ago, before I came to Kensington, when you went on your sea-voyage, you have wondered at many things connected with me. You shall have your curiosity satisfied.

You remember, of course, my exodus from Okehampton, after my wife's death. You, among many other friends, followed my poor wife to the grave, but no one, not even you, guessed what a trial her illness was to me.

From some source, probably papers left by her father, she got an idea that something about his death was suspicious, and after that our married life was unhappy.

Well, she died, and my brother practitioner who attended her signed the death certificate without the slightest suspicion entering his mind as to any assistance she may have had in

leaving this unhappy world. Then I migrated to London, having sold the Okehampton practice.

I bought a partnership in the West End, but I did not agree with my colleague very well, and it became necessary very shortly for one of us to go.

He went.

In a most inexplicable manner he contracted an attack of erysipelas, and this, instead of clearing up, as it should have done, became worse and ultimately killed him.

I had at the time a very severe case of erysipelas among my patients, and I cannot help thinking that he contracted his attack through me.

It was this way. I had taken some swabs of fluid, alive, of course, with the bacillus of erysipelas, and stupidly forgot to put them away.

The swabs were left in the surgery with some pins sticking in them, and he, knowing nothing about them, picked up the innocent-looking fragments of cotton-wool containing the poison—and the pins—and threw them away.

I fear that he pricked his finger badly while so doing, and consequently infected himself.

And carefully as I tended and dressed him, he died.

Among my patients was Admiral App-Smith, who lived on Campden Hill, and through him I made a nice little sum and found a staunch friend. If I should die before him (I am still treating him) he occasionally will wonder greatly at his sudden recovery from the bad chronic dyspepsia which has troubled him for the past eight years.

"Confound you, d'Escombe," he would often say, "just as you have cured me, on it comes again. You doctor-fellows aren't much good, after all."

"That's all very well, Admiral," I would reply. "You are nearly eighty; be thankful you're alive."

The Admiral had a daughter, who was married to an utter scamp, well-connected—but a drunkard. In those days, I spent my evenings in the houses of friends who had home ties, and as the App-Smiths' house was close to my residence, I put in many odd hours there.

One day, the daughter, Mrs. Crosswell, came to Cromwell Road to see me, and I noticed that she looked ill.

She was a very pretty woman, tall and dark, with almost a Spanish cast of countenance.

"What brings you here to-day, Mrs. Crosswell?" I asked.

She sat down wearily. "I hardly know how to begin, Doctor," she replied; "but look here," and pulling up her sleeve, she showed me on her beautiful, round, white arm, two greenish-black discolorations—evidently bruises.

I started. "How on earth did you get hurt like that?"

"My husband's mark," she said.

"What? Mr. Crosswell did that? By accident."

"Done by intention, and with his fist. But this is nothing; see here," and tearing open the lace on her chest, she showed me just below the throat another mark more recent, more severe, and more extensive.

"He is brutal, and I cannot live with him any longer," she cried. "Not only does he strike me and hurt me in every way, but he suspects me of being untrue to him."

She sank back in the chair, her white, uncovered chest heaving, and tears starting to flow down her cheeks.

At this moment I heard an altercation outside my door, and the next moment in burst

Crosswell himself. His face was flushed, his hat on the back of his head, and his clothes awry and dishevelled.

"So," he shouted, "*she is* here, and with the wonderful doctor who is such a friend of her family."

He swayed as he spoke, and clutched a chair.

"You infernal blackguard! Calling yourself a friend under the cloak of pill-mixing! I'll horse-whip you till you can't stand," he shouted. I made no reply to him, but seeing that the lady could now leave, I said to her:

"Kindly wait in the hall, Mrs. Crosswell, while I have a word or two with—your husband."

"She'll do nothing of the kind," he said. "Stay here, Louise."

I opened the door and showed his wife out. Her husband started to intercept me, but tripped and fell headlong at his first step.

He picked himself up, however, and made a rush at me.

You know me, Lawrence; I am not a child, and when he got near me I just quietly sat him on a sofa with one of the simple little tricks of the wily Jap.

"Now, sir," I said, "you shall explain

yourself, and a full explanation I shall want, followed by an apology."

He had evidently drunk a lot already that day, for even now his rage was disappearing and a sleepy, maudlin look was commencing to fill his previously bright eyes.

"You'll get no explan—explanation from me, or 'pology either, damn you!"

"What do you mean by following your wife and forcing your way into my house in the way you've done?" I demanded. "You're going to be ill, I can see, Mr. Crosswell. Sit still a minute until I come back."

It was very evident to me that he was on the verge of delirium tremens. When I came back he was looking round in a stupid, dazed manner, and he took the draught of bromide I gave him without a word. I sent for a taxi, and we all got in and drove to their house.

During the journey I noticed that he was breaking out into that profuse sweat which is common to all alcoholic cases, but the dose I had given him was keeping him quiet.

Having reached our destination, I said to his still tearful wife, "I am going to see him in bed myself, and then we must send for a nurse; he's in for a bad time."

"Will he talk much before the nurse?" she inquired.

"Don't trouble about that," I answered; "I will see to it that we have a discreet woman."

Her husband had by now gone to his room, and when I went up to him he was lying on the bed.

"What do you want here, you hound?" he growled. "Wait till I'm better. I'll show you up, and her too."

"You get up and I'll help you undress," I replied, but, calm as I appeared, his remarks bothered me. One word against a doctor's reputation and it is damned.

"You're not going to doctor me, don't you think it," growled the sick man. "I'll send for Lanner-Brown." He referred to you!

"All right, get to bed and we'll see," I answered, and he allowed me to help him—showing, of course, how unbalanced his mind was.

I went home, had a cigar and a large cocaine and soda—a strange drink, you say, old man, but as you very well know, a wonderful help at times, if you're used to it.

I had thought, and I decided. This man must not be allowed to cause trouble, and yet it

would not be wisdom on my part to let him take a sudden and suspicious turn for the worse.

I gave him morphia that night.

When I visited him he was sitting up in bed, flushed, sweating, and laughing immoderately.

In the morning I had a long conversation with the Admiral, and took the opportunity of giving him a little arsenic in his whisky and soda.

I told him all the circumstances, and he was shocked.

"What on earth can we do, d'Escombe?" he said. "I'm sure he'll do what he says. Poor, poor Louise!"

"I don't know; I'm afraid I'm a ruined man," I replied; "but I would give anything to save her."

After seeing my patient, I sat down in Mrs. Crosswell's cosy little room and had a long talk. At the end of this conversation she made the remark:

"Well, Dr. d'Escombe, if that arrangement is carried out, I shall thank you and bless you all my days."

The case went on through the usual course of such attacks, but as the man rallied, a curious change seemed to take place in his character and general demeanour.

He became almost childish—and his memory was not as good as it should be.

On the sixth night after his attack I paid my evening visit early. The nurse was asleep and Mrs. Crosswell was in charge. If you had watched me closely that evening you would have noticed a little hypodermic syringe in my left hand as I went to examine my patient.

He was half asleep, and as I felt his pulse I sent his wife into the next room for some small thing. While she was away the point of the syringe found its way into the arm of the semi-conscious man, and the syringe was emptied. He started up in bed, and his wife hurried back on hearing him shout.

"What is the matter?" she breathlessly exclaimed.

"It's nothing, my dear lady," I said calmly, although my heart was beating fast—too fast—and a sudden fear seemed to clutch it; if this woman found out, and told all she knew, there was risk—serious risk.

"He's stuck something into me. What is it—oh, what has he done?" moaned the invalid.

"Have you done anything, Dr. d'Escombe?"

"Simply ordinary treatment, my dear lady.

Don't take any notice of his roarings," I said, unconcernedly.

That night Mr. Crosswell had an attack which resembled apoplexy at first, but which, later, developed into maniacal raving. I treated him in consultation with you, and he ultimately recovered.

The one sad result of the illness was total loss of memory.

Probably, my dear fellow, you have not that intimate knowledge of poisonous alkaloids that I have, and even now I have no doubt that you did not understand the way I managed it.

I had steadily during his illness given him small doses of hyoscyamine, one of the alkaloids of henbane, and on that last night I mention I gave him a big dose, and this drug, you may not know, if carefully administered, will cause insensibility, afterwards mania, and then, on recovery of bodily health, very frequently complete loss of memory.

The value of drugs is beyond description. Even you, most worthy friend, had at one time in my house enough cocaine in your coffee to enable me to win five pounds off you at bridge.

Perhaps you remember that night you got

so excited. Hurrah for drugs, and bravo for the man who has the knowledge and pluck to use them!

The Crosswells live in Maida Vale now; he is very harmless, and his wife is very sad about him.

My agreement with her, of which I spoke, was to, if necessary, get him put under control, if he continued his statements.

I only did this to blind her as to my methods and to obtain the large cheque which was promised me both by father and daughter if I could save her from her husband.

They little knew the means adopted by me, not to save her, but to escape myself from the tongue of that drunken brute.

CHAPTER VII

IN WHICH A RISKY COUP IS DESCRIBED

I DID think that when, leaving a balance of a few hundreds in the hands of my long-suffering bank-manager, I went for a tour in the Royal Mail boat *Dorsetshire* to China and Japan I should be free of matters medical, and also clear of financial difficulties necessitating risky *coups*. But no. "Adventures to the adventurous."

Indeed, when I arrived home I had paid my somewhat extravagant expenses and was an extra fifteen hundred in hand.

I was very happy on board for the first six weeks. The ship, although not large, was comfortable, the majority of the officers were good fellows, and passengers were few. Nothing is so delightful to the busy man, if he is a decent sailor and not in search of constant and varied excitement, as a long sea voyage. The absence of the postman is,

perhaps, the most delightful point of all—no daily worries, nothing to answer, no bills to make you shudder and rush to the tantalus. If you are also a keen chess and card player, then the life, for a few months, is ideal.

The skipper of the *Dorsetshire* was a most able man, but an amusing study. He was obsessed with the idea that he was a lady-killer of the most accomplished type, and I believe he really considered himself handsome, but he held a "lone hand" in that belief. I mention this because, later on, this curious, almost ludicrous, fancy of his was of great value to me—and another.

As the voyage progressed and we got into warmer climes, our passenger-list increased, and before Shanghai, outward bound, the first-class saloon was nearly full.

The ship's doctor was an Irishman named Currie; tall and thin, with a delightful brogue, a maximum of assurance and a minimum of professional ability. What small amount of medical knowledge he originally possessed had been gradually dissipated into thin sea-air or dissolved in whisky-and-soda, and it was with great joy that he informed me at this latter port that another profes-

sional brother was coming aboard, with his wife.

"Sure, and we'll be a happy family now," said he. "And I'll be relying on the two of ye to help me."

The new arrival was a good-featured, clean-shaven man who, however, showed traces of dissipation in his loose-lipped mouth and fluid bright eyes, and this conjecture of mine was soon confirmed when I saw him drink a tumbler of champagne, which he was compelled to hold with both hands, before breakfast on the first morning after we left port.

His wife was a brilliant little woman with very golden hair and a slim, yet almost perfect figure, which was shown to the best advantage in the thin China silk frocks worn so much in the tropics. In a day or two Dr. and Mrs. Toilet were a most popular couple among the company on board.

The majority of the other ladies adopted the rôle of being somewhat strait-laced. This was undoubtedly because they were afraid of each other, for gossip in the Far East travels very fast, and before long they appeared to be of one opinion about Mrs. Toilet and gave her, to a certain degree, the cold shoulder. This drove her to the smoking-room—she was

an inveterate smoker—and the company of men, of whom the chief officer—a lengthy and cadaverous individual called Verte—and myself were the most favoured.

It was not long before she confided to me the trouble about her husband—he drank too much, and he took morphia, the result being that half his time was spent in the smoking and card rooms, and the other half in a state of semi-stupefaction in his cabin.

I was out for a holiday, however. I certainly didn't want to be bothered with women, and I am afraid I turned a deaf ear to her pretty sayings, and refused to enter into any flirtation.

"I believe you are made of wood, Dr. d'Escombe," she said one day to me. "Will nothing move you? Are you quite emotionless?"

"No, my dear child," I said, smiling at her, "but everything of that kind in the East is too easy and simple—and it's far too hot."

"Then I'm not going to waste my time on you," she laughed. "I'm going to conquer that dear, ugly captain—or else his immaculate chief."

"Both much too easy," I answered. "But count on me to help you."

On the following day Dr. Currie came to me. I was playing chess on deck.

"Can you spare me a minute in my cabin, Docther?" he inquired. And when I got there he told me that Toillet was very bad; he feared delirium tremens. Would I see him in consultation?

Toillet was certainly rather ill; twisting and turning in his bunk, with bright expressionless eyes and busy fingers and a face flushed and unshaved.

"Jolly glad to see you, d'Er—d'Er—what is it?" he said. "Have a drink; ring for the steward."

"Too hot, old man; wait a bit," I said quietly. "You're not looking quite fit."

"Fit!" he shouted, starting up. "Fit! How can I be fit with that she-devil about? Where is she now?" He looked vacantly round the cabin. "Mamie, you little devil, where are you?" he continued in a loud voice. And then, whispering confidentially: "She's always spying about somewhere—perhaps she's under the bunk?"

"No, no; she's on deck," answered Currie. "I'll go and bring her back in a minute," turning to me.

As he left the sick man leaned over to me.

"Come here, close, Doctor, I want to tell you something." He looked quite sensible for a moment. "Sister Mamie and I aren't—well, you understand?—but it's a secret—only you know." And then suddenly he shouted: "Je-rusalem! see those green beetles on the wall. Get me some morphia, quick, man—they're after me!" And he started into the incoherent rambling of alcoholism.

I wondered if his statement were true—and for the first time the idea of making something out of the trip occurred to me. Toilet was evidently a sick man—his possessions and expenditure showed money, and I promptly decided to cultivate his wife more carefully.

Currie returned alone. "She is sitting on the boat-deck with the 'Old Man,'" he reported, "who's making very hot running, and the Chief on the bridge is lookin' mighty sick."

We decided to give our patient a dose of morphia to get him some sleep if possible, and then we had a chat about him in the dispensary.

"They haven't been on board long," he said, "but there's only one bottle of brandy left. The chief steward's holdin' that up for 'medical comforts.'"

"Why do you say *they*?" I queried.

"They're both tarred with the same brush," said he, "only she can 'carry on' and he can't."

I had something to think about that evening. It still seemed plain to me that there was the strong possibility of money-making in this situation. He rich, she evidently unscrupulous and, I imagined, innately vicious; moreover the two of them possessed a weakness which can nearly always be turned to account by the wise man. Truly said the ancient: "In vino veritas."

I managed to get a *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Toillet after dinner, and told her that I had been to see her husband in consultation.

"We didn't like to interrupt you, seeing that you were so occupied on the boat-deck," I said.

"What nonsense!" she laughed. "I was only amusing myself with that conceited old idiot, and because I wanted to make the old 'cats' on board jealous; they all hate me, you know." She laughed as she turned and looked me straight in the face with an expression I know very well and which means much to the man of the world.

"Let's go down to my cabin and have something with ice," I suggested promptly.

"Rather!" said she. And before long we were chatting most confidentially, and I had been told the history of her husband's weaknesses. I did not tell her what I knew; I thought it would possibly be of use later on; but two days after—acquaintances develop very rapidly in the tropics on board ship—I had the whole story from her.

"I am sick and tired of him," she confided, "and if I were only certain about his money I shouldn't care a hang how much he drank, or how many doses of morphia he had. He is always jealous," she continued, "and he only wants me just to feel that I am his property and must stay near him while he is maudlin and half helpless."

"I am very sorry for you, poor child," I told her. "I wish I could help you."

"So you can," she answered, sitting up close to me on my settee. "You're a doctor; you can do anything. I'd make it worth your while." And suddenly she leant over and kissed me. "Now you will help me, won't you? I'm so sick of it all," she added with a wicked little smile.

"You run away and let me think matters

over," I said, and in a half joking way pushed her out of my cabin. Women are very difficult in those parts of the world, Laurence. You've been East, and you know.

I did think things over, and a difficult problem I had to face. It was not so hard to dispose of Toilet—I had an idea for that—but I had to make sure of my money from her if I did so.

"You must keep clear of me," I told her the next time I had an opportunity. "Make up to the Old Man. He's ready enough. Don't give folks aboard any opening to couple our names together. I hate to tell you so," I added mendaciously, knowing how easily her *amour propre* might be offended. "But I have a plan——"

"Dear old chap, I thought you were the one to help me," she answered. "But you must explain to me."

"All right, walk with me on deck before dinner to-night," I suggested. "There's safety in a crowd."

We walked, and she told me point-blank that if her reputed husband died she would get twenty thousand pounds, as he had made a will in her favour about eighteen months

before, at which time his mental balance could not be questioned.

We talked around the subject for half an hour, and then she suddenly said: "Well, Doc, I'm going to dress." And as she turned to go, whispered: "Two thousand for you, if you manage it."

"Yes," I thought, "but should I get it?" However, there was no certain way of making quite sure, and I decided to trust my luck.

Dr. Toillet was, in the meantime, picking up somewhat, but as he got better of the alcoholic poisoning so the depression which it left caused him to increase his doses of morphia, and on two occasions I found him in a heavy stertorous sleep when I dropped into his cabin to look at him.

Dr. Currie was very pleased to have any work taken off his hands, and consequently I had no difficulty in another two days' time in giving the invalid a hypodermic injection of apomorphine and a preparation of calabar-bean mixed together. I might have done this earlier, but I waited until the wind had freshened up somewhat—enough to give us a bit of a lop, anyway. You ask why, Laurence?

For this reason. I had decided that Dr. Toillet should die of sea-sickness, induced, of

course, by his previous illness, as in health he was a good sailor, and the injection I gave was certain to cause obstinate vomiting, and would also seriously affect his heart. But it all had to appear very natural; life on ship-board being so narrow and confined that every soul knows practically every detail of the life and doings of everybody else.

My arrangement worked well, however, and that evening as we steamed merrily along with a fresh breeze on our starboard quarter, Currie came to me, and said:

"Toillet's ver-ry bad. This weather's made him sick—mortal sick."

"That's serious," I answered. "Where's his wife?"

"Oh, she's down, lookin' afther him," answered the well-meaning old chap. "She's a real good one after all, if it's a bonâ fide illness."

"So she is," I said. "Let's go and see her."

The patient looked bad, very bad indeed. His face had become dusky and drawn, and he was constantly sick; I hardly thought the one dose would have had such an effect.

Mrs. Toillet looked at me—just one glance, but sufficient. She guessed, and she gave a

tiny, almost imperceptible nod, as though to say: "All right, the two thousand holds good."

She nursed the patient assiduously for the next couple of days, and I had to seize the opportunity of a boat and fire-station drill, which I sent her up to watch and which took away all stewards and undesirables from the cabins and alleyways, to give another injection.

"This should be sufficient," I told myself as I threw the light cover over the collapsed patient. I wondered if I should get the money after all. I had a strong idea in my mind that I should.

She appeared on deck late that night, and, finding me alone, came to my side, and said: "I suppose I have to thank you for this?"

"Very possibly," I answered. And then suddenly I added: "Do you think that, as a friend, you could lend me a couple of hundred pounds in a day or two? I have a great necessity for it just now."

"I'll write you a cheque for a hundred and fifty to-night, Doctor, if you want it," was her answer. And then in a whisper: "How long?"

"I hope to see a change in about thirty-six hours," I replied.

"You're a real good pal," was her rejoinder. "I thought I knew a real man when I saw him."

"A very pretty eye for a blackguard," I thought to myself. "You're a clever woman."

I got my cheque in an envelope half an hour later, with a polite little note thanking me for my kindness to her husband and herself. And three hours after I received it Currie came to my cabin and waked me out of a sleep on my settee.

"I think Toilet's finished," he said somewhat excitedly. "Poor-r devil—he's done for-r himself. Will you come and see him?"

I went, and, sure enough, Toilet was at his last gasp; the cold sweat of death was upon his face, which had become blue and pinched.

"It's all over, Currie," I whispered. "Keep quiet." And I pointed to the figure of the almost-widow as she sat half huddled up on a chair, apparently crying bitterly. She was a magnificent actress, Brown. I defy any man to say she wasn't overcome with grief at that moment.

"The sickness stopped about two hours ago," Currie told me. "But his heart was so shaky that he couldn't rally. D'ye know he

took morphia?" he asked in an undertone. "That finished him."

"No, I knew nothing," said I. "I only feel that a good chap has gone."

We buried him the day before we arrived at Nagasaki, and his widow—who obtained a perfect rig-out of mourning from a Chinese tailor—seemed overcome with grief but said she must go home with us.

And so we carried her the round trip, always a poor pathetic little figure, inviting the sympathy of everybody, and only getting her few moments of recreation in my cabin. She looked forward to her brandy-and-soda there as the only saving clause in her life.

To cut it all short, we got home: she proved his will. It was made out to her in her maiden name, and his relations at first were inclined to contest it. But they gave up the idea. The evidence was too strong against them, and they could not stultify his name. anyway.

I got my money, but I had to make three or four journeys to see the lady, and talk pretty straight to her before I really did put it in my pocket. And all the time I knew it was just a toss-up whether I gained or not.

However, I was very pleased ultimately, that

I had honoured the *Dorsetshire* with my company, and I often wonder when next I shall meet the widow, and what devil's game she has been up to in the meantime.

She was one of those women who could not help but get into mischief and what the world calls wickedness.

CHAPTER VIII

IN WHICH A PROBLEM IS PRESENTED

WHEN Dr. Richard Elleston was defeated by me in our candidature for the post of Honorary Physician to the newly-erected Cottage Hospital at Newbridge, where I practised for a little time after Okehampton and on my return from the East, a great amount of sympathy was shown by his numerous friends and admirers, and all the gossips of the neighbourhood had a most valuable topic of conversation for some weeks. But it remains for you, my dear friend, to let the light in upon the secret history of the election.

He had been established in practice on the spot for several years. I was a comparatively new comer. He had, as patients, nearly all the influential residents. I had the poorer people and—his enemies. As you know well, every medical man in general practice is

certain to make plenty of the latter. We were, of course, working in opposition, but I adopted the friendly attitude towards him, whereas he, whenever the opportunity occurred, did his best to depreciate my abilities and position. He was in reality very jealous of me, and, though I say it, he had reason to be.

Now, this post to the new hospital meant a great deal to the man who got it, and I made up my mind that the man should be myself. But how was it to be managed? It could only be done by undermining his position among the governors who had the power of election and who were all, with two exceptions, in his favour. Not that I was unpopular, but he was the older man, the more experienced practitioner, and the private medical attendant to all but the two I mention of the powers in existence.

The Chairman was a retired Army officer, a red-faced, loud-voiced, dogmatic and bumptious colonel, but withal a man who meant well, and who stood by his friends. It was through this man that I decided to act. He had married a second time, and had one child—a boy of ten—by the second wife, of whom he was inordinately proud, but who was by no means a nice youth—not one of

the decent, manly, don't-care-a-bit sort of boys, but a weedy, red-haired stripling, who was cordially disliked by everyone with whom he came in contact.

I was quite friendly with Colonel Matherson. Indeed I frequently dropped into his bungalow after dinner for a game of picquet a cigar and a whisky-and-soda, and it was on the occasion of one of these evening visits that I learnt the fact that "Octavius the beloved" was sick and that Dr. Elleston had been called in.

The idea came to me in a second. Here was my opportunity to discredit my opponent. It was very evident that if I could turn the Chairman of the Governors into a supporter of myself, instead of the champion of Dr. Elleston, I should have a very strong sporting chance of grabbing the appointment.

I called next day on some pretext and inquired after the young cub Octavius, and was told that he was somewhat better, but that the doctor had put him on very light diet as he considered that he habitually ate too many sweets. I could see a substratum of annoyance in Mrs. Matherson; her dear Octavius could never do anything wrong. "Eat too much—nonsense—nonsense," she declared.

"Poor little chap," I said very sympathetically, "I'm so sorry for him. Can I go and cheer him up a little?"

"Please do, Dr. d'Escombe," said the lady with a grateful look. "He will be so glad to see you."

I saw him—nasty little youngster!—but I made myself very pleasant, and got a reward for my forbearance that evening when Colonel Matherson thanked me for my kindness.

"What do you think of him?" he asked me.

I was very diplomatic, my dear Brown, I can assure you. I had a rather difficult game to play.

"He doesn't seem to me to be ill," I said with a somewhat nervous air. "But it is never wise to take things too lightly."

"Just what I said, the very words!" assented the Colonel, evidently very pleased. "I told Dr. Elleston that he is a delicate and highly-strung boy and difficult to understand."

Highly strung! Oh, the value of those two words to us of the medical profession—eh? They will get us out of almost any difficulty if we manipulate them properly!

"I doubt if Dr. Elleston really understands

children such as Octavius," he continued, "although he is a good man, a very good man. But somehow, as my wife says, he lacks sympathy."

So he did, Brown, for some cases; he was a bit too straightforward for really successful general practice.

"Yes," interrupted the Colonel's wife as she suddenly re-entered the room, "he told me that a dose of castor oil and three days starvation would do the boy all the good in the world."

"Oh, dear, dear!" said the anxious father. "Starve the poor child! What do you think, d'Escombe?"—turning to me.

"Oh, I mustn't interfere, you know," I replied gravely. "But you must not let him get too low. I'm hoping to see him all right in a day or two." As a matter of fact Master Octavius was in for an attack of typhoid fever with which I proposed to infect him within the next two or three days.

The point was this. Typhoid takes a very long time to develop, as perhaps you know; you may be infected for three weeks or a month—walking about, playing games, doing your work, and simply feeling tired and limp all the time—but in the end the acute stage

of the fever supervenes and the patient becomes really ill.

I luckily had at this time a patient who was suffering from typhoid—just an isolated case—and on the following day I obtained the necessary infective matter from his house—how, it matters not—and on the following day called to see Octavius and gave him a few sweets, knowing that as they were forbidden him he would hold his tongue, and most certainly eat them.

And now came the question of diplomacy. I had to get my fish to rise to my fly.

The Colonel was always pleased to see me for a smoke and drink after dinner, and within the week Dr. Elleston and myself were sitting together listening to the yarns of the old soldier.

“You are quite happy about the boy, Doctor?” he asked my professional brother.

“Oh, quite,” answered Elleston in his bluff way; “he’s all right; just the digestive upset of a boy who doesn’t know when he’s had enough to eat.”

“Well, I thought he looked a little bit seedy,” I remarked in a deprecating way. “But still, boys will be boys.”

“Yes, of course,” laughed “the Opposi-

tion." "I'll wager my reputation he's all right in a few days."

"I hope you're right," said I with a side glance at the Colonel, who, I could see, noticed that we were not quite in agreement. And we proceeded to talk of other matters. But later, when Elleston had gone, my host said to me:

"I believe you're a bit doubtful about 'Tavy,' aren't you, d'Escombe?"

"To tell you truth, Colonel, I am just a shade," I answered. "But there, it's not my business; only I can't help thinking that one cannot be too cautious in such a case. He's rather a delicate little chap, and, personally, I should not yet give a definite opinion."

"You're a good chap, d'Escombe," was the answer. "I tell you frankly I wish you were looking after him for me, but I can't give Elleston up—although I believe he's a bit out of date."

And so it went on for a week or two; the boy to my eye evidently sickening for typhoid, but to that of Elleston he appeared simply lazy, spoiled and lackadaisical.

The Colonel worried as days passed, and one night Elleston, having been badgered a good deal, said: "I'll bet my reputation, and

anything else you like, that the child is well in a week."

He looked at me, with no friendly glance, and I took his challenge.

"I can't help thinking you're wrong," I replied, having waited for this opportunity; "but, of course, I can't say much; I haven't examined him. I only go by his appearance."

"Yes, and that's a darned poor one," interrupted the boy's father. "What about a consultation, Elleston?"

At this the senior practitioner of the district flared up.

"Oh, if you're not satisfied, Colonel, do as you like; it's quite immaterial to me. Perhaps d'Escombe would like to take the case over."

This was war to the knife.

"Not at all," I said very quietly; "there is no reason to be offended, Dr. Elleston. The Colonel is naturally very anxious."

"Anxious!" the other almost shouted. "Anxious! over an overfed youngster whose digestion and stomach have been upset by improper feeding! There's nothing to be anxious about."

"Don't get out of temper about it, my dear chap," said the Colonel apologetically.

"You know I've trusted you all these years. But with only the one boy I get 'nervy.'"

"And rightly so, sir," I chimed in, seeing that a little fillip was necessary. "And although I am sorry that Dr. Elleston should have taken what I've said in the spirit he has, yet I still say I am not quite happy about the boy."

This was enough. The old family doctor, with a savage look at me, said he was going; and the Colonel accompanied him to the door. Before I left I distinctly heard him say that if anything went wrong it would be a bad day for Elleston.

Days went on, the boy looked whiter and more tired, and certainly his medical attendant would have sounded a note of alarm earlier except for the fact that he would have to acknowledge his mistake, and my perspicuity, until at last the boy's temperature told its tale.

Then there was trouble. A consulting physician was sent for, but before that the Colonel asked me my private opinion and I told him I feared typhoid. He mentioned this to Elleston, who pooh-poohed the idea, until the new adviser said definitely that it was so.

The day following the consultation saw me installed as the family doctor, Elleston having been summarily dismissed after a great row with the Colonel.

He came to my place the same night, and asked me why I had suspected typhoid. Had I had any cases at the time?

"It's very curious to me," he continued. "Why, where has the infection come from? The boy has not been out for over a month; that means that he has probably become infected since he's been laid up. I don't understand it, d'Escombe," he said very severely. "I suppose this will mean that you will get the new appointment—but be careful," he added banefully; "I tell you I don't understand it."

I laughed lightly at his words, but all the time felt a little nervous. If the boy should let out the fact that I gave him the sweets some weeks before, it might look awkward. Elleston was suspicious.

I thought a lot that night, and decided that no more risk must be run. You will not be surprised, therefore, to hear that my special hypodermic was loaded in my pocket on my next visit to the wretched Octavius, and had you had the opportunity of watching me you

would have seen that the charge in the syringe was labelled "Muscarin."

I sent the nurse on a short errand to another part of the house when I went upstairs to my young patient, who was almost unconscious, being in the very acute stage of the fever.

And within twelve hours he died somewhat suddenly of heart failure.

This was absolutely the death-blow to Dr. Elleston's hopes for the new appointment, as Colonel Matherson, quietly primed and prompted in a diplomatic manner by me, swore that his old medical attendant shouldn't have a look in—and he didn't.

I got the post comfortably, and I really don't think the world lost anything by the "dropping out" of Octavius.

CHAPTER IX

IN WHICH I ATTEND AN ECCENTRIC PATIENT

I AM writing to-night about an hour after saying good-bye to you, O most worthy friend!

Do you remember what a long time you spent in discussing the Camden Town mystery on one particular day?

This room of mine certainly has many curious things hidden in it. Many a tale would some of them tell, if they could speak. You noticed some empty cultivation-tubes this evening, and asked me why I kept them.

I am now going to write the true history of those tubes this evening.

It was before you came to Kensington that these happenings took place. Quite close to my house lived an old fellow named Humphrey Friende. He dwelt in his own house, was unmarried, and was attended by a man-servant

whom he called Jacques. There were two maid-servants also; for my friend was very well off, and his house was excellently furnished and managed. He was a very cantankerous old man, who had quarrelled with all his relations. But he had a few friends, of whom perhaps I was the greatest.

We had one strong link between us, a mutual love for chess-playing. Two evenings in every week were religiously kept free by both of us, but the games were always played at his house; he refused to go out of doors after sunset.

We ultimately became very great friends, and he gave me to understand that I should benefit considerably by his will, and I knew that he would "cut up" well.

Little did he know that his skill and enthusiasm for *the* game was keeping him from terrors of which no ordinary person has ever dreamt. It is, doubtless, a good thing for many people that toxicologists like myself are rare, and that the science and art of poisoning is an almost unknown cult.

I fancy that I won a few more games than my opponent in the long run, but he was a very strong player.

I well remember our last evening's chess,

and I have never ceased to regret, although I was a thousand pounds richer for it, the untimely death of Mr. Humphrey Friende.

It could not be helped, as you will see.

I was tired that night, and I went across to my friend's house in Addison Road, hoping to forget my weariness and worries by having a good fight over the chess-board.

The door was opened by Jacques. This man was a very singular character. He looked about eighty years old, but was as active and strong as a man of forty. He had been the confidential servant of Mr. Friende since they were both young men.

"Good-evening, doctor," he said; "my master is waiting for you, and the men's all ready."

"Thank you, Jacques," I replied; "I hope to leave here a winner to-night."

"I hope you *won't*, sir," answered the faithful Jacques; "something has upset my master to-day, and perhaps if he won to-night he would feel better."

I was certainly off colour that night, and a carefully prepared attack on the King's knight's side by the enemy got me into such desperate straits that I resigned at move forty-three.

"An even fiver on the next game," was my challenge.

"Done," said Humphrey Friende; "the fiver is mine."

We tossed for move, and I won.

I had not the sum of money with me if I lost. Long and deeply I thought, but somehow defeat was looming ahead.

"I have won—I have you!" chuckled the old man, as time went on; "you had better resign—it's waste of time going on."

So it was. I resigned.

"Double or quits," I said. "Just one more game."

"Certainly, certainly," replied the victor; "but, first—Jacques"—he rang the bell.

The faithful Jacques appeared instantly, as if he had been at the door itself.

"Whisky, soda, and cigars," his master ordered, "and then you need not wait up for me. I may be late."

"Help yourself, doctor, and me, if you don't mind," said Friende, "and now for a great struggle."

Temptation was too strong for me here, Brown, and I dropped two minute tabloids of digitalin into my opponent's drink. Ten pounds was far too much for me to lose, just at this time.

I only put enough into the drink to make him feel queer; I wouldn't have killed him then for anything. I should have no one to play chess with if he were gone.

We started once again, and twice during the game I fancied I heard a movement outside the door. Could Jacques possibly be waiting and watching? I must be careful—surely he had not seen me doctor the whisky-and-soda?

If he had, trouble was brewing.

As time passed, I noticed that Friende was getting pale, and, suddenly, without a moment's warning, he dropped off his chair in a dead faint. Before I could do more, his man Jacques was in the room.

He picked his master up, undid his collar and shirt and laid him on the sofa, taking no notice whatever of me until these actions were completed. Then, his little eyes glaring furiously at me, he said:

"If he dies, I know how he was killed. I saw you put something in his drink—I watched you—I thought you were trying to do him good, but now I see—you—a doctor—doing this for a paltry ten pounds."

"My dear Jacques, what are you——"

"Don't talk to me," said the man,

apparently mad with rage. "If my master dies, you shall hang—hang, I say, or, if not, I shall kill you myself with these hands," and he extended his long claw-like fingers towards me.

At this moment Friende opened his eyes, and said in unsteady tones:

"What on earth is the matter? Have I been ill?"

"Only for a minute, sir," answered Jacques.

I stepped forward with the idea in my mind that I might perhaps be able to bluff things out, but Jacques jumped in front of me.

"You are not going near him till he knows why he was ill," he snarled.

Turning to his master, he said, pointing at me:

"That man put poison in your drink, sir. I saw him do it. I was watching the game from behind the door. It was he who made you ill, so that he might win ten pounds."

"It's a lie," I replied, looking savagely at Jacques, who was still breathing short from excitement. Humphrey Friende looked me straight in the face.

"Jacques has never told a lie yet, Dr. d'Escombe. May I ask you myself, did you put anything in my drink?"

I saw that the game was up, and replied:

"Well, if you must know, I thought you were looking seedy, and gave you a little medicine without making you aware of the fact."

"A very opportune moment to drug me," he sneered. "But, oh, doctor, doctor, you of all men. I would have gladly given you the ten pounds!"

Then, getting angry, he continued: "This, of course, is your last visit here, and I tell you point-blank that my will will read differently next week. I am too hurt to say any more. Jacques, show Dr. d'Escombe the door."

"You will be sorry, Mr. Friende, that you should have acted like this, just on the word of a scarecrow servant such as that," I said angrily, pointing to Jacques, who only smiled and opened the door for me.

I was very sick with myself that night, and I had a good stiff glass of soda and my particular poison at once. I was not going to be beaten without a struggle, and sat down to smoke and turn things over in my mind. He must not alter his will, that was the point. As I ruminated, my eyes glancing idly round my cosy room, the thought of a diphtheria cultivation-tube upstairs gave me an idea.

I looked at the clock; ten minutes after midnight. By half-past I had collected on my table a pair of soft rubber shoes, a small compendium jemmy and pick-lock—given to me by a patient who was very expert with it—an electric torch, a big bunch of all kinds of keys, two cultivation-tubes, a revolver, a small bundle of cotton-wool and some very thin rubber operating gloves. After carefully examining each article, to make sure that everything there was in perfect working order, I lit a big cigar, and sat down to read.

By the time I had smoked a second cigar it was nearly two o'clock.

Behold me, then, in soft hat, overcoat, rubber shoes on my feet, and the rest of my paraphernalia in my pockets, carefully looking round from the shelter of my front door, trying to locate the policeman on the beat. I waited for ten minutes; everything was silent and still. I waited until a heavy cloud turned the streets and houses into deep shadows before I rapidly crossed the road. I went round to the house of one Humphrey Friende, Esq., to pay a late night call—and I did not go to the front door—no—but round the house to the kitchen quarters.

There were two doors, and I tried my care-

fully oiled keys on both. The first had its own key in the lock inside. The second was clear, but was of no use to me. I turned the lock easily with one of my keys, but the door was bolted as well.

I then tried some pliers on the key of the other door, and in ten seconds I stood within the scullery of my house of call.

My first action was to re-lock the door, knowing as I did that policemen have a nasty habit of looking round and noticing open windows, doors, etc. The key was left in so that my retreat would be hindered only for a moment, should I have to hurry home.

Walking slowly and quietly, I made my way to the smoking-room I knew so well. Everything was absolutely quiet, and by the aid of my electric torch, occasionally used, I arrived without a sound at my destination. This was the wall on which, hung the elaborate pipe-rack, in which, carefully arranged, was the collection of pipes smoked regularly by my one-time companion and opponent.

Now to make matters safe.

Out of my pocket came the glass tubes.

These, by the light of the torch, were opened. I took the precaution of putting on the rubber gloves before starting on this stage

of the proceedings. The cotton-wool was now used, and in five minutes all the mouth-pieces of the numerous pipes, cigar and cigarette holders, were smeared with a virulent diphtheria cultivation. Anyone putting these pipes into his mouth for the next day or two ran a big risk of contracting the disease mentioned.

I could do no more, and having put back into my pocket every trace I had made of my nocturnal visit, I carefully and silently retraced my steps to the back door, exulting in my successful visit.

"Botheration," I half-whispered to myself as I got to the exit, "the key's gone."

It was.

In a moment my hand grasped the revolver in my side pocket, and I stood in the darkness, fearing to breathe. Someone was about, and listening most intently, I felt certain I heard the sound of restrained respiration quite close to me.

I decided.

With my revolver in my right hand I pressed the button of my electric torch with the left, and looked round me. I had an idea of what I should see, and I was right. On the other side of the room holding a great stick was Jacques.

Jacques, whitefaced and trembling, the same and yet not the same. He was surprised and frightened.

He hadn't expected me.

"One word and you're a dead man, Jacques," I said, with an angry frown and an expression on my face that told the wretched, shaking servant that I meant what I said.

He had evidently thought to entrap burglars and had not expected the sudden illumination and attack, and certainly not me. As a matter of fact, if I had been two seconds later, he would have been outside the other door in the scullery, and the alarm would have been sounding through the house. My luck just saved me.

Immediate action following decision got me through this scrape.

"Listen to me, Jacques. Do you hear me?"

"Yes, sir."

"I have been trying to find your master's will."

"Yes, sir."

"I have failed."

"Yes, sir."

"Oh, hang your 'Yes, sirs'—you will not whisper one word about my being here."

"No, sir."

"That is all very well, Master Jacques, I have had one experience of you this evening already. I must make things certain as far as you are concerned."

"Yes, sir."

"Put down that stick; put it down," I continued; he showed some inclination to come for me, I thought.

"Quickly!—now don't forget—one sound of alarm, or movement, and I fire." The revolver was still pointing straight at him.

"Please pay attention. I have done no harm in the house either to your master or to yourself, have I?"

"No, sir."

He had not seen me in the smoking-room. All was well.

"You will not, therefore, open your mouth as to this visit of mine?"

"No."

"Wait a minute. To make it safe—take this piece of paper and pen"—I took them out of my pocket with difficulty, the revolver and torch each requiring attention—"and write, 'I, John Jacques,' write it down—'I, John Jacques, freely confess, that Dr. More d'Escombe found me stealing.'"

"Oh, no, sir—no——"

"Quiet, you fool," I whispered. "If you waken any of the household, it will be the end of you,—write."

"‘My master’s cigars, spirits and money on the night of October the thirteenth, nineteen hundred and nine.’"

"Sign it."

He did so, great beads of sweat standing out on his lean, hard face.

"Now give it to me. I have done no harm, and if you keep quiet, there will be no trouble. Good-night, Jacques."

I crossed the road once more, feeling pretty safe. Jacques dare not say a word. What could he say? Friende himself might escape but most likely not. He was a great smoker, and without doubt he would use two or three of those pipes that I had turned into such deadly traps.

I slept quite well that night, and woke up quite fresh in the morning.

Would Fate prove kind or false?

Would Friende get ill before he altered his will? All was quiet during that first day.

On the second day a carriage drew up at Mr. Humphrey Friende’s house—a doctor’s carriage.

Eureka!—he was ill.

He was—very ill, and in spite of all treatment he died of acute diphtheria, and was followed in two days by his man-servant, Jacques, who it was thought contracted the disease from him.

But Jacques was an inveterate smoker.

So ended my happy chess evenings; but the will was not altered, and my temporary financial troubles were once more at an end.

CHAPTER X

IN WHICH I SILENCE AN ENEMY

ABOUT two years after I had started practice in Cromwell Road, I found it necessary to keep an assistant. This need implicated me, a little later on, in a trial of wits which became ultimately a duel to the death between myself and a remarkably clever young man, who possessed that scorn and utter disregard of the modern code of morality, which I flattered myself I had never come across except in my own personality.

You and I, Laurence, have frequently been opponents, and sometimes partners in the only two great games of skill played in England; there are others much more difficult played abroad: I mean whist and chess. Chess, as we have often remarked, is a game of practically mathematical certainty, and you can each see both sides of the game. But whist is different: it does not require that foresight and brain-

wearing calculation and appreciation of the ultimate disposition of forces, which, if you are cute enough to see it, must come. On the other hand, however, it requires deduction, the art of discovering the enemy's plans and movements in the future by utilizing the few, and often trivial, signs vouchsafed to you by the play in the early part of the hand.

The man with the exact, mathematical mind will win at chess. Whist wants more than that; it wants an argumentative and reasoning brain with the faculty of putting two and two together, and, at the same time, the cunning necessary to mislead the adversary in his deductive reasoning with regard to you.

I mention this, because in my duel with young Anderson, it was my superior power of reasoning from small things to big, which enabled me to follow his coffin to the grave, instead of vice versa.

This young man—he had only been qualified two years—came to me with the most flattering testimonials from his college and hospital, and he had that keen and alert look about his small, closely set, greenish eyes with their light eyelashes, and almost invisible eyebrows, which showed a brain quick to understand,

and act, while the big nose and square jaw indicated pluck and determination.

I made a great mistake in going against one of my axioms, when I closed with him; he had bright red hair—and I always have distrusted, and always shall distrust the red-headed man—and pursue the red-headed woman.

I took him into my house, fixed him up a room which could serve both as a bed and sitting apartment if he wished to be alone; but he had the run of the house also.

I first suspected him of prying when I found a brown boot-button under a chair in my smoking-room, which chair I used to stand on in order to get at a little safe that I had had built into the panelled wall seven feet from the ground. It seemed to me that the button must have been forced off when a step up on to the chair was made, and—Anderson always wore brown button boots.

The inference was he had been examining, or tampering with my safe.

The question occurred at once, was he suspicious of me and consequently trying to find out what he could, or, was he simply a thief?

From that time I watched him closely, but

discovered nothing. I therefore treated him even more affably than before, but took the precaution of removing everything of importance from the safe to my bank in a sealed tin box.

I was having a lot of trouble just at this time with a nurse, a keen, handsome woman of the world, bent solely on self-aggrandisement. She had been called in to attend a case of mine which had ended fatally, but, sad to say, the patient before she died confided enough to this nurse to enable her to come and threaten me, unless I made it worth her while to keep quiet. I was talking one evening to Anderson in his room; we had each just lighted a cigar, when the page-boy came to tell me that Nurse James, the blackmailer I mentioned, would like to see me.

"Excuse me, Anderson," I said. "I must just see this woman; I shan't be long."

I had, however, quite a lengthy and very stormy interview, which ended in the transference of two five-pound notes from my pocket to her purse. I was startled when I came to let her out to find the door of my room ajar. I could have sworn I shut it most carefully when I entered; therefore someone,

taking advantage of our heated argument, had played the eavesdropper. This was serious.

I went back to Anderson's room, and in a moment knew that it was he who had listened, and that now he knew too much for my safety.

You will remember that when I went away we had just lit cigars. I left him smoking, and when I came back he was still smoking, but only the first half-inch had been consumed; the cigar had not been touched while I was away; mine was nearly finished. The idea struck him about ten seconds later, and he threw the tell-tale roll of tobacco into the fire, saying that he felt queer, as an excuse.

Matters began to look serious; it was quite certain that this red-headed devil was a dangerous enemy, a man to be reckoned with; and I began to turn over schemes in my mind for his defeat.

"I can't chuck him, that's certain," I thought. "One breath of suspicion and twenty criminal offences might be raked up against me. It's only my position, my extravagant living, and prompt payment of all local debts which keeps me, like Cæsar's wife, beyond suspicion. One inkling in the right quarter, and I'm bowled out."

I had at this time two distinct and separate causes of fear, which I could hardly hope to escape from for any length of time, seeing that I was again very short of money.

Two plans of campaign had to be mapped out. I decided that the "nurse" danger was the more important, seeing that a post-mortem on the case she knew of would mean absolute disaster, and only needed a word from her to be brought about.

You have seen, Laurence, in your time, that I got on well with the fair sex; and I proceeded to fall desperately in love with this handsome clever woman who was so dangerous.

My wife had been dead two years, and the chance of catching and marrying the successful, good-looking (I'm not boasting, as you know) doctor, was too great a temptation.

We became engaged, and rarely a day passed that I did not spend an hour or two with her in her quiet room. You will not be surprised to hear that before long the tendency to drink, which she had suffered from for some time, increased to a very marked extent.

Meanwhile, Anderson, all unconscious of my knowledge of his treachery, poked and pryed

about to try and get more information as to my affairs ; but to no avail.

I was too careful.

“What about a holiday, Anderson ?” I asked him about six months after he came to me. “Things are very slack ; don’t you want to go and see your people ?” I was trying to get information, because I wanted to know whom I should have to deal with when he was taken ill.

He looked up at me, a sharp, keen glance, and then, turning away, said, “My people are dead, except one brother. He’s an advocate in Edinburgh, and doesn’t want me about.”

“Then you don’t want to go away ?”

“Thank you very much, no.”

He was a smart young man this ; I felt that he suspected some motive in my question, but of course could not tell what.

The opportunity for disposing of the black-mailing lady came before long. For some weeks she had been bothering me to make our engagement known, which was the last thing I wanted ; consequently my presents of brandy and champagne had become more frequent, but had made sad inroads into my scanty store of ready money, and it was with great joy that I welcomed a message one evening to go to

Notting Hill and see Nurse James, who was very ill.

"Good old chappie, here we are," said the flushed, dishevelled-looking woman, who, with her loose hair hanging round her shoulders, which were covered by a brilliant dressing-jacket, sat up in bed, the wild stare of delirium in her eyes.

"Coming to sit with me and see all the devils?—thousands of them; and they're all got up like tom-tits, see—all over the bed?—I keep on catching them. There's another," and she made a motion of seizing a fluttering bird and wringing its neck.

"That one's done for—now let's have a drink; half and half champagne and brandy, fizz and cognac for two—garçon!"

She was in the grip of alcoholic poisoning.

I called for the landlady.

"She must have someone to sit with her and look after her," I said. "Has she any friends or relatives that you know of? She would never open her mouth on the subject to me."

"I don't know of anyone, sorr," answered the corpulent, and almost blue-faced Irish-woman. "Nobody's ever-r come to see her-r, savin' your worship."

"Can you find anyone who knows anything about nursing?"

"There's Widdy O'Halloran down the street, sorr, she've done a bit av it."

"See if she'll come in and help; I'll pay her," I said.

"The good Lord bless ye for a kind gintleman," said the old soul in a husky whisper as she left the room.

"You love, come over to me," shouted the invalid. "Where are the drinks?"

"Coming, Susie, coming," I said. "Now you must stay quiet in bed," and I mixed her a good tumblerful of the drink she required.

The Widdy O'Halloran was able to stop, and, giving her instructions, I left, followed by the imprecations of the once handsome, clever nurse.

I went straight to the house of Dale, a practitioner close by, and, telling him of the case, asked if he would, as a favour, look in and see her, and give me his opinion.

"She has nursed several cases for me," I told him, "and I am anxious about her; she seems to be quite friendless."

I dare not, as you will understand, put in a trained nurse, as she might in her ravings talk about me; whereas the Widdy, if supplied

with a sufficiency of gin, would take no notice.

I went to see her again that night, but took my trusty hypodermic with me, which I was able to use quite comfortably, as the sick woman was lying half comatose from exhaustion. She was pretty certain to recover unless further steps were taken; but that was all in my plan from the very first.

I injected a mixture of atropine and aconite, which, without altering the symptoms in any way, would cause intense depression of the heart, and prevent that tendency to rally which is common to the first attack of delirium tremens.

When I left the house, thinking that very probably I had seen the last of Susie, I was startled and surprised for the moment to see the figure of a man run round to the back of the little semi-detached villa I had just left.

The sick-room was on the ground floor, and, turning back, I went to the window, and found out what I suspected; namely, that it was possible, on account of an ill-fitting blind, to see half the room from the outside, and, unfortunately, that half in which the bed was situated.

"A spy," I said. "Could it be anyone but Anderson?"

I decided to make inquiries when I got home; and instead of going to the club as was my wont in the evening, I hailed the first taxi I could find, and hurried back to my house. I took the precaution to examine the soil in the little garden before I left, and even brought a small piece away with me.

"Now if Anderson's out, and has any mud on his boots like this, I have him," I muttered. "And, vice versa, he has me to a certain extent; he must have seen me use the hypodermic."

If once he had any definite evidence against me, my life would not be worth living, and once he knew that I *knew* that he knew, my chances of beating him would become very much less. To-night should decide.

I reached home; he *was* out, but as no one had seen me go in, I left again secretly, and when I once more got back about midnight, there was Anderson sitting by the fire in felt slippers, smoking and drinking.

"What a beast of a night," he volunteered; it certainly was cold and damp. "I'm jolly glad I've been able to sit nice and quiet all the evening."

"Quite a pretty liar," I thought, but said, "Well, I'm awfully sorry, but I'm very tired; would you mind just running up to the Major and giving him his evening dose?"

This was a patient in Nevern Square whom I always saw myself, but I felt I must get Anderson out of the way for awhile, in order to have a look round his room.

"Yes, I'll go at once," he answered, and when he came back ready to go out he was wearing a clean pair of boots.

The moment he had gone, and I had fastened the outer door, I went to his apartment, and sure enough, as I thought, I found a pair of boots with plenty of the clayey soil which I expected to find clinging to them.

I at once wrote a note to the medical man whom I had asked to see Susie, saying that I should be away for a day or two, would he be so kind as to look after her, order what he wanted, and charge to me. He had a very poor practice, and would, I knew, be glad to do anything.

"I'm going to have a few days in the country, Anderson," I said to that gentleman a few days later, as we sat and smoked, "and you must come with me; I like to have some one sensible to talk to, instead of being con-

stantly bored by the drivel of the ordinary chance acquaintance of the country."

He looked at me, a sharp, half inquiring glance from those keen eyes of his, and I imagined him saying to himself, "Does he suspect me, is this a trap?"

"Where do you propose to go?" he inquired.

"I am going to a little place called Hythe in the Southampton Water, a most delightful spot; a friend of mine has offered me the use of his bungalow for a while. And I'm going to accept the offer," was my reply.

He didn't quite like it; I could fathom the doubt in his mind as to whether he was safe. You see, he was beginning to know me, but there was no way out for him, and so, accepting the inevitable, he smiled blandly and asked:

"When do we go?"

"The day after to-morrow, thank goodness," I answered. "And I think we ought to have a thundering good time. No work, and plenty to do."

I don't think he ever dreamt that there was the remotest chance of his leaving that bungalow feet foremost, although he had vague suspicions, I knew, that my arrangements were made. At the same time I felt that I had a

clever and resourceful antagonist, and that it behoved me to look after myself.

Breakfast next morning brought me a short note from Dale, my colleague in attendance on Nurse James, saying that she had died during the night—should he sign the certificate?

I wrote back thanking him very profusely, and asked him to see to everything for me, both certificate and funeral, and I enclosed with much pleasure (really with profound regret) notes for twenty pounds, the balance from which I hoped he would accept for his trouble. Danger number one was crossed off—scratched!

Now for number two, but this one was difficult and required great care.

We were soon settled in our bungalow, with an old woman to look after us by day, but who left us solus by night.

I knew it was imperative that Anderson should not leave this little domicile alive, although he was at this time the picture of health and strength.

I did not take much baggage with me, but I took a dispatch box which I locked and sealed, and generally took an inordinate amount of care over; it had nothing of importance in it, but it was taken with a purpose.

I wished to make absolutely certain; the evidence against my assistant, so far, was purely circumstantial. This box was the bait!

Deductive reasoning told me that if the young man wished to make a search, he could only do it at night, and in order to do that I must be kept asleep.

Morphia of course would be the drug chosen, easy to give, only slightly bitter; it can be mixed in beer or tea with the greatest ease; although the books tell you that it must be dissolved in acid. I must tell you, Brown, at this point that I have taken large doses of morphia every day for some years, and have found it the most delightful stimulant and help in times of stress that one could imagine or wish for. Anderson was ignorant of this, and I was not surprised on our second lonely evening in the bungalow to detect morphia in my whisky and soda.

I went off placidly on the sofa in what appeared to him to be a deep sleep; as a matter of fact, the dose he gave me was just enough to slightly stimulate my faculties, and when he went to my bedroom in his search for documents or whatever he could find, I took the opportunity to put into his half empty glass a vegetable drug the name of

which I will not give away even to you, Laurence; my experience that night made me decide never to use it again, or tell its name. This occasion was the first and last time I used it in a poisonous dose.

He came back, flushed and angry-looking, and while I watched him with eyes nearly closed he drank off the doctored whisky and cursed aloud at his failure; he even shook his fist at me as I lay apparently helpless.

Then came the gradual onset of the symptoms of my drug.

This evil thing paralyses the muscular system, but leaves the nervous system untouched, and given in the right dose it affects the voluntary muscles first, leaving the involuntary, that is those of the heart and principal organs which this system governs, unaffected for the time being.

Imagine, then, Anderson, his red head damp, and clammy with the sweat of fear, his eyes moving quickly and with a terrified expression, his breath coming in short, sobbing gasps, lying on the thick skin rug in front of the little fire-place. Imagine him, I say, when he saw me, whom he thought to have put to sleep for hours, move slowly off the sofa, and walk towards him with the smile of the victor,

"What have you done to me, you fiend?" he jerked out in a husky, horrid voice. "Tell me, am I dying? you devil! you devil!"

"Yes, Master Anderson," I answered. "You thought to beat me, to blackmail me, to drug me, while all the time you pretended to be my friend. Well, you've lost, and before long your other muscles will fail just as your arms and legs, and *motor* muscles generally, have already failed. You thought to play me false, you cursed hound; and you're taking the consequences."

"Oh, God, d'Escombe," he begged, "give me a chance. I'll be your slave. I'll do anything for you, but don't let me die like this." He made a desperate effort to move, but to no purpose, only the rolling of his eyes and his deep groans told of his struggle.

"Too late now, too late," I said. "You will keep your senses for a day or two perhaps, but I must stop your talking, because I am sending for the village doctor to attend you."

The irony of the thing seemed too much for him, and he sank back in a temporary stupor, during which I attended with a second hypodermic injection to his vocal chords.

thereby making sure that he would tell no tales.

The round, jolly little country practitioner came next day. "Embolism or thrombosis, don't you think?" he suggested, turning to me, and I smiled a grim smile at the eyes of the sick man, who could hear, but could neither move nor speak. It certainly must be a very horrible position to be in, especially when you feel you are dying.

"Quite right, doctor," I answered. "Not much chance." I didn't look at him many more times; in fact, those eyes of his haunt me yet, but self-defence is the first law of nature, and I had recently been hard pressed.

I saw to his funeral and sent him quite a nice wreath. Then, after a few weeks' sailing and fishing in Norfolk, I went back to work, feeling at any rate safe for the time being. But it had been a strenuous fight, and if I had not been a morphia-taker, probably Anderson would have come out on top.

I could afford to take a risk in a tiny out-of-the-way village which in London would have been extremely dangerous. Do you see now what I meant by deduction as against apparent logical certainties?

I finish this just before leaving to play a

rubber at your house, Brown, and I hope by some means or other, crooked most likely, to get a fiver or two out of you, and the old duffers with you.

Au revoir for this evening.

CHAPTER XI

IN WHICH I ATTEND A STRANGE CASE

SIR RICHARD NANSON, of the firm of Nanson & Nanson, foreign bankers, in Moorgate Street, was a small mine of wealth to me for about four months.

I met him first at Monte Carlo, the place above all others, to my mind, for a short holiday.

He was one of those big, handsome, aristocratic-looking men, with a long, fair beard, tinged with grey, and a voice of the most beautiful quality.

As you know by this time, Brown, I am a being of the most complex nature. I love music, I can sit and listen to it all day if it is good, I am a great admirer of art—indeed, I am not at all a bad artist myself, and yet at the same time, there are few vices I have not indulged in.

Yes, I find pleasure in the very lowest and

most diabolically wicked places which are to be found on the Continent—nothing of that kind jars on me.

All this, apropos of Nanson's voice.

A strong desire to know him was soon satisfied by a mutual friend visiting at the Casino, and, curiously enough, he took a great fancy to me, so much so, that, as we were both without travelling companions, he asked me to be his guest at the Hôtel de Paris, in which he was staying, for the last three days of my short visit to the gamblers' paradise.

You may be certain I accepted the invitation very promptly, and hoped that, in the future, something substantial in the way of financial increment might be the outcome of the new friendship struck up in this unexpected manner. We went about together constantly during the next three days, and in that time I made a discovery, or at least felt certain that I had.

Sir Richard Nanson was in the early stage of that grim and fatal disease, G.P.I., as we call it, General Paralysis of the Insane being the full name.

The first stage of this affection, which is much more common than folks imagine, is very often one of exaltation, during which the

sufferer imagines himself possessed of wealth untold, or power unlimited. It was while the banker was in this diseased frame of mind that I hoped to feather my nest at his expense. Without going into further detail at this point, I may say that on my return to London, I managed to extract no less than five thousand pounds from him in the course of the next two months. I so contrived that not even his subordinates, or clerks at the bank, had any definite proof that this money had been given to me.

I received it all in notes, and as far as anybody knew, these notes had been used by the head of the firm himself.

Of course, if suspicion arose they could be traced, but suspicion should not be aroused if I could help it. I say nobody knew it, and I went my way, happy in that belief, until the day on which he paid me the last five hundred.

On that particular morning I had cause to go out suddenly into the little ante-room adjoining his office in the bank, in which Fernie, an old servant, waited all day to attend to the personal wants of his master.

There was a solid party-wall between the two rooms, but running along the top of this

wall was a narrow strip of glass, evidently put there to give more light to the office.

I was disagreeably surprised when I entered the ante-room to see Fernie standing on a wooden office chair, which in its turn stood on a small table, with his nose glued to the glass which I have mentioned. It was evident that he could see, and in all probability hear, what went on in his master's sanctum.

I took an antipathy to the creature the first time I saw him. He was a little, thin, dried-up atom of a man, with a wizened, wrinkled face, and sharp, beady black eyes, which I felt sure took in all that went on around their owner.

"Hullo, Fernie," I said quietly, "what's the game up there?"

He jumped down with wonderful activity for a man over sixty, and coming close up to me, his restless, twinkling eyes shining quite malignantly, he squeaked out in his high-pitched voice:

"I seen yer—I seen yer every time when 'e give yer all them notes; you ain't playin' fair with 'im—'e don't know wot 'e's a-doin' of—you've got to give 'em back, d'ye 'ear, 'e'll want 'em all for Miss Lucy."

This was awkward, because it was a certainty that before long all the world must know of the banker's illness, and an inquiry into his finances would inevitably follow. With this little devil as a witness against me, my dealings with a man whose brain was affected would cause me serious trouble if they came out.

I could see that it was necessary to go "canny" with this queer specimen of humanity, and I asked, "Why do you say 'he doesn't know what he's doing'?"

"I've knowed 'im thirty years," was the answer, "and I've seen that 'e's not been 'isself for some time."

"You're talking nonsense, Fernie," I laughed, "Sir Richard is all right."

I kept away from the bank for close on a fortnight after this, and then received a message from Sir Richard asking me to visit him at his private house, in Kensington Gardens, which, so far, I had avoided.

I was very disgusted when I saw Fernie, dressed in irreproachable black, open the door for me, and I did not fail to notice the look, both suspicious and impertinent, which he gave me. Nanson was sitting in an arm-chair in his gorgeously furnished bedroom, and I

was surprised to see the change which two weeks had made in him.

"Where the devil have you been all this long time, d'Escombe?" he inquired. "I'm very seedy. My brain's queer, I don't seem to be able to think logically, and my money matters are all in a muddle. I don't know if I've got any left. Didn't I give you some once?"

"Oh, no, Sir Richard," I answered, and as I spoke I looked round the room, half expecting to see that horrid little hound Fernie somewhere about.

"As you know, d'Escombe, I've only got my daughter to think of, but I don't know how I stand, or how she would be situated if I died now. I can't get to the bank; I shouldn't comprehend things if I could. What's coming to me, doctor, am I going mad?" he asked, and the once strong-minded, able, and plucky financier burst into a flood of tears.

"Cheer up, man," I said, "I'll just keep you in bed for a week or so, and give you a chance to pick up; you've been overdoing it."

"All right, d'Escombe," was the answer. "But I refuse to see any visitors, or do any

business. Only you, and Lucy, and Fernie shall be allowed in."

I had a talk with his daughter before I left, and told her that the outlook was bad, but suggested that we should wait another fortnight before letting anyone into the secret, if things worked out according to my prognosis.

"Once brand a man with brain trouble and he is condemned for the rest of his life," I told her.

Fernie opened the door to show me out that afternoon, and as he did so, said to me, "That money's Miss Lucy's; you give it to her, doctor; I've seen 'im and you over them notes."

The affair was now at such a pass as to cause me "furiously to think," but it was two days later that *the* idea came to me.

Sir Richard's mental faculties were rapidly getting worse. It was now necessary either for his daughter, Fernie or me to be always in attendance on him, and it was a look that he gave Fernie, and which I caught, that first put the project into my head.

The banker's brain, as I have told you, was very unbalanced; he was irritable, suspicious, and difficult to manage, and it was quite easy for me to do what I wished, namely, to inflame his mind against his old servant.

"I don't like telling tales, Sir Richard," I said to him; "but there is a leakage of information about your health. I was asked only yesterday if your brain was queer. Of course I said no, but where did the idea come from? Only your daughter, myself or Fernie could possibly have said anything."

"Then it must be that rascal," he shouted. "Send for him now, I'll show him that he can't play fast and loose with me."

"Gently, Sir Richard, gently," I said. "You must keep calm, sleep on it, and we'll see to-morrow; in the meantime I'll make a few inquiries for you."

He calmed down, and I went home to make preparations for carrying out my scheme.

I proposed, after sowing the seeds of suspicion in the sick man's mind against Fernie, once more to utilize a certain alkaloid and a drug in combination, the effect of which, injected hypodermically, would be to cause in the banker's tottering brain an intense excitement, which would be very likely to take a homicidal form. If, when the effect was at its climax, he should be alone with Fernie, then—well, he was big and still muscular, and the servant would not have a chance, if trouble *did* come. It was a lovely plan, and

I felt quite pleased with myself, as I overhauled my syringe, pregnant with so great a potential power of evil.

I intended to use muscarin, a little known extractive from poisonous fungi, and curare, and I felt pretty certain that they would have the desired effect. And then, with Fernie removed, and Nanson looked upon as a lunatic, the finger of suspicion could not be pointed at me.

I had had made to my design, about two years before, a pocket-case which would hold in safety a fully charged hypodermic syringe, and this was a necessity to me, because, as a rule, when I used my favourite weapon, it had to be manipulated in a hurry. If it were necessary to charge it on the scene of action, a considerable amount of time was required, and very often I had not more than thirty or forty seconds, free from observation, in which to work.

On the next morning, I still further inflamed my patient's temper against Fernie, and when he became excited I gave him two tabloids of morphia, ostensibly to calm him, really to keep him quiet until the other drugs were active, and then, after waiting half an hour, I put my syringe into the back of his neck, and injected

the prepared mixture. The usual place in which to give a hypodermic is, of course, the arm, but it shows, and, except for legitimate work, I always use the neck. In order to make things safe, I told Miss Nanson that I thought she wanted more fresh air, and said that at two o'clock I should call for her and take her for a short run in my motor. She demurred for a while, but I got my own way ultimately, and as I handed her into the car later on I remarked to Fernie, who had run downstairs for a moment, "We leave him in your most capable hands, Fernie, I'm sure he will be safe."

Did some strange presentiment come over him just then? He certainly went suddenly white, indeed almost ghastly. I confess I felt a little excited as we drew up at the Nanson establishment about a quarter-past three, but no, everything was quite peaceful.

"Good God," I thought, "am I going to fail?"

"Everything quite quiet, Sarah?" asked the young mistress, as the neat housemaid brought in afternoon tea.

"Yes, miss, quite quiet," answered the girl.

Little did the two women dream that I was on tenter-hooks from second to second,

as I waited for something to happen, I hardly knew what, myself.

“Should we hear his death scream?” I wondered.

I really think that was the longest forty-seven minutes of my life.

The maid returned to remove the cups, and I imagined that Miss Nanson would be curious about my unusually long stay, and then, just as the girl got to the door with the tray it happened.

It *was* a scream.

It came suddenly, out of the silence of the big house, a horrid, dreadful sound of mortal, hopeless fear, so horrid as to give even me that feeling that one's blood is freezing in one's body. Then it died away for a moment only, and recurred with a change of note—a deeper, more despairing and terrifying screech than before, which only a man facing immediate death could utter; a long-drawn-out last hopeless call, ending in a choking, gurgling bubble—and then—silence.

“What is it? What has happened? Oh, doctor, what is it?” whispered Miss Nanson, as she half tottered towards me. “Is it in the house? W-w-was it father?”

The maid still remained motionless by the

door, and as I said "Come, Miss Nanson, let us see what it is," I put my hand on the girl's shoulder, and told her to find the coachman and send him upstairs to me.

All was quiet as we started to go to the invalid's room, but when we got nearer to it, a low, fiendish, blood-curdling chuckle made us stand for a moment and listen.

The girl clutched tight hold of my arm. "I'm frightened, doctor. Oh, I'm so frightened," she said in a low, trembling voice; "something awful has happened."

I had an idea of what I should see, but, good God! I never in all my life saw anything quite so repulsive and loathsome.

One glance, and I stepped back, closing the door as I did so.

"Go downstairs, Miss Lucy," I said; "I will look after things, and see to your father, but this is no sight for you."

She went, and on the stairs passed the square-jawed, strongly-built coachman for whom I had sent.

He did not look any too happy as I told him to follow me, and when he entered his master's bedroom behind me I thought he would have collapsed.

Lying on his back with his head towards the

foot of the bed was the wretched Fernie, his face blue-black, and puffed out almost beyond recognition; froth issued from his swollen lips, while the thin but sinewy hands of his master still convulsively gripped the bruised and discoloured neck of his victim.

Sir Richard Nanson, with hair dishevelled, and clothed only in a long, white night shirt, was kneeling on the bed, one knee on each side of the dead man, and as I looked he stared at me with an expression I can only describe as being like that of a maddened, half-famished cat, who has just caught a bird, and fears that it is going to be taken from him.

There was no sign of recognition in his wild, bloodshot eyes, and he made no movement, only that he looked about him quickly, savagely, and furtively, as if watching to see that no one came to take his prey from him.

It was quite evident that Fernie was dead, and that his destroyer was suffering from acute and dangerous mania.

"No doubt about the action of muscarin and curare," I told myself; "but I must certainly have more experience before I use them again; evidently the mixture was wrong, or I gave too big a dose."

The police were sent for, and ultimately Sir

I ATTEND A STRANGE CASE 191

Richard became an inmate of an asylum, in which he has remained ever since.

The banker's affairs when examined were in a terrible state, and I went to a good deal of trouble in order to find Lucy Nanson, who is a very independent young person, a post as lady-companion to some society aristocrat.

And I kept, *and have spent*, the five thousand.

CHAPTER XII

IN WHICH A PATIENT GROWS CONFIDENTIAL

YOU may often, O most worthy brother-medico, persuade an old trout, even if he is not on the feed, to take a fly, by putting it over him time after time.

He seems to get tired of seeing the same old fly so often, and after following it down the stream many times he will ultimately rise at it, and then there's a fine old splash.

As in this delightful sport, so in my life, I have caught a wary old fish many a time by the above method. Living about two miles from Cromwell Road, in a lonely thoroughfare in the old part of Hammersmith, was one Michael Stone. His house, The Nook (save the word!), was a tumble-down old stone edifice, lying well back from the highway—an ugly, repulsive-looking dwelling in which “spooks,” and such like, might well have their being.

This dismal dwelling was inhabited by two people only, the old man above mentioned and his niece, a girl named Polly. The man had the reputation of being a miser, and certainly his appearance was suitable to the character. He was a tall, spare old man, with a long cadaverous face, a great aquiline nose, and straggling white hair. His niece was a short, buxom young woman with a nice manner and a soft, pleasing voice.

I was first called to The Nook to attend Mr. Stone for an attack of angina pectoris, a heart affection, which, as you know, is intensely painful, but not often fatal.

He was a difficult man to get on with—in fact he had no friends or visitors. I managed, however, to ingratiate myself both with uncle and niece, and went occasionally to the lonely old house to play draughts with my patient, a game to which he was very partial.

Now, as to the remarks about the trout and the fly. I regarded Michael Stone as a wary old fish, and I was constantly baiting him to let me into the secret of his supposed hoards of gold, if any, and if so, where? I was fairly certain that rumour did not speak falsely in the matter.

I was playing his favourite game with him

in his only sitting-room one evening when he rose to my lure. His niece had gone to bed.

We had just finished a game, which I allowed him to win, and I got up as if to leave, when he stopped me, and said, "One moment, doctor; I have come to look upon you as a very honest and straightforward man." And he continued, "You have told me that sooner or later one of these horrible attacks of mine may be the end of me. I must, I suppose, make a will, and I want your assistance."

I had always treated him, during these attacks, with nitro-glycerine, but had never told him the name of the remedy or given him a prescription, in order, of course, to keep up a regular attendance upon him.

I mention this as a prelude to the incidents which occurred later.

"My dear Mr. Stone," I said, "of course if I can be of any use to you, I am always at your service."

"I felt sure you would help me, doctor," replied the old man. "Now I've been a saving man all my life, and I've gold—gold I say—hidden. It is to go to my niece,—to Polly, but I want no lawyers prying round, and, mark you, no death duties. You shall

help me, doctor, and you shall be paid for so doing. Listen to me. I've got my money in this house—but hush—let us talk in whispers—no one must hear us.”

He bent over close to my ear and dropped his voice.

“Not a word to a soul, doctor. They think the poor old man has money. So he has,” and here he gave another of his eerie cackles. “But they don’t know how much. I love it, man, and Polly shall have it—but she doesn’t know anything.”

I had a shrewd idea that Polly did know something. But how much, I had to find out.

“Come with me, doctor,” continued the old man.

He hobbled out of the room, his stick in one hand, a guttering candle in the other.

I followed with joy in my heart. I had at last achieved my end, at the cost of many a weary evening.

He reached the end of the corridor, opened a door which let in a rush of air, and we stepped into an empty stone-floored room, which had once, I thought, been a kitchen. The old man put the candle down on the empty hearth, and looked all around him. “Shut that door,” said he, as he opened the

old oven with shaking hands and drew out a bag, which—thanks be! gave forth the sound of coins.

“See here, doctor, this is gold, gold—all mine! I come here and count it—there are eight bags—eight hundred pounds.” He was talking in an excited whisper, his eyes flashing and his hands trembling. “All mine—and nobody knows.”

“I see,” I said. “And all this is for Polly?”

“Yes! Yes! When I’m dead and gone. But this is not all. Come.”

To make a short story of it, I followed him round the tumble-down old place into all sorts of queer and uncanny holes and corners, and by the time he had finished I was half-dazed with my luck.

He had just about seven thousand pounds in gold hidden away in that ramshackle old house, and this, except a small sum for Polly, would be a most acceptable addition to my very impoverished exchequer.

How much did Miss Polly know? How often had she followed her uncle in his midnight excursions? I must make it my business to find answers to these questions before assisting my patient across Styx.

Shortly after showing me his money, Michael Stone had a bad attack of angina: I was often at the house, and consequently had the desired opportunity to become very friendly with the somewhat stolid and unconversational Polly.

I ultimately made her talk, and one day she confided in me that she knew her uncle had money hidden in the house.

"I saw him put a big bag up the old scullery chimney one night. The scullery is never used, you know."

"Did you find out what was in the bag, Polly?"

"Yes, I did, doctor, it was sovereigns."

"Keep an eye on that bag, Polly," I said. "It may be your fortune. But hasn't your uncle got more than that put away?"

"I haven't seen any more," she said. "There's a lot of money there."

This was a most satisfactory conversation. I could see my way clear.

I waste no time, when my way is straight, my dear Lanner-Brown, and on the day following my talk with Polly, I went to a motor establishment, and after much talking hired a small 12-14 horse-power car for a month.

I knew something of driving, but I obtained

the services of a chauffeur, who knew the little car well, for a fortnight.

This deal, simple as it seemed, put the days of Mr. Michael Stone in this unhappy world at about twenty to thirty in number.

You see my plan?

Stone was to die; I was to remove the gold. Polly was to have what I thought safe and wise to leave.

The car turned out to be a little treasure, and in a week I could do anything with her in the way of driving. I dismissed the man; and for the future drove her myself.

I was now waiting.

Would the old man get ill, or had I to make him so?

He saved me the trouble.

Three weeks from the time I got the car I also got my opportunity.

About half-past eight in the morning of the day I mention, Polly sent me up a message, "Would I come at once?"

Would I come!

I sent word to her, "I would drive over as soon as I was dressed."

On arriving at the house, I left the car well inside the ramshackle old gate, and went right into the long, low sitting-room.

On a shaky and ancient horse-hair sofa lay the miser, partly dressed. An expression of extreme agony—the fearful pain of angina—was on his face. The attack was a bad one—he might possibly die without assistance. Good!

“He is very bad,” I said to Polly. “I think I can relieve him for the time being, but I want a prescription made up. Will you go to the chemist, and get it?”

“Yes, doctor, but what about uncle?”

“Don’t fear, I’ll stay with him until you return,” I answered. I gave her a note to give to the chemist—it was nothing important, but it got her out of the way.

It took me twenty minutes to put about five thousand pounds in gold into the car, and then I started on a search through the out-houses.

As I came back from my last journey I thought I would look at my patient.

As I entered the door of the room in which I had left him I felt a violent blow on my head; so severe was it that I dropped to the floor. I was not, however, knocked right out, and picking myself up, I looked round in a dazed, half sensible kind of way, wondering what had happened.

The figure of old Stone met my view. He

was standing by the table—leaning on it with one hand, the other holding the heavy stick with which he had just attacked me.

His face was convulsed with fury. He tried to speak, but only the inarticulate sounds hissed out while he raised his stick as if to attack me again.

He had recovered temporarily from his seizure, although I could have sworn he was safe for an hour.

I stepped over to him, and, by a strong effort of will overcoming my repugnance at touching him, removed the stick from his hand. I had to use considerable force to take it, and then he tried hard to bite me, slavering over me in a most hateful manner that made me cross, and I hit him over the head hard enough to lay him out.

He dropped with a groan, and I immediately picked him up and carried him to his sofa.

Now, time was of the essence of the contract; Polly would soon be back.

Firstly, out came my chief friend, the dear little hypodermic, and into the shrivelled arm of the unconscious man went enough strychnine and cocaine for my purpose.

He should die in a fit. Then a run to the motor to see the gold covered up safely.

Yes, all was well!

Now to put the room tidy and conceal any evidence of the unexpected conflict.

I looked at the old man's head. I had made a nasty bump on it which showed plainly. Why didn't the strychnine begin to act; then he could struggle and hurt himself!

He must have more. He was still quite quiet. Another injection and I sat down to wait.

Was the infernal stuff never going to act?

I decided to go and meet Polly and delay her entrance to the room; she was due to be back.

I stopped her at the door, and said, "He's quiet and peaceful now; have you got the medicine?"

"Yes, doctor," she answered breathlessly.

At that moment, a fiendish scream rang through the house, and we both rushed to the old man.

He had started up from the sofa, and was in the midst of a severe convulsion, which very shortly brought his head and his heels almost together. The strychnine was at work.

"Oh, how awful," said Polly; "I never saw him like that before."

I did not attempt any treatment when Polly

was there, she could not then say anything to my detriment in case any part of the day's work was discovered.

Michael Stone was now dying rapidly, and I told his niece this.

"I must go now," I said. "I am sorry I cannot do anything more to help you—but—but I will come over again later, and then we must see about your affairs. I will do all I can for you. Good-bye."

I was anxious to get the gold off the premises, and I wasted no time in starting the car.

I am not an expert in motors, and you can imagine my horror when I found the thing would not start.

Here was a pretty kettle of fish—after all my care and scheming to find myself utterly baulked by a beastly motor.

What was I to do?

The gold must come out—a big business; and where was it to go?

I glared around in an ecstasy of rage and desperation. If Polly were not about! I retraced my steps to the house, and found the girl watching the now rapidly dying man.

"Polly," I said, "my motor refuses to move; I must get a man out here to see to it. Will

you take a message for me, if I sit here and look after your uncle?"

"I couldn't leave him now, doctor," she replied. "I hope you don't mind, but he's been kind to me in his way, and I should like to be with him till the end."

Nothing would go right.

"Very well," I answered. "I suppose I must go myself, but don't leave him for a second. You can't be too careful, Polly."

I went back to the old garden, and noticed lying in the evergreen shrubs a rusty old roller with a hollow drum.

This would do for a temporary hiding-place, and I proceeded rapidly to transfer the many bags of gold from the car to the interior of the roller. I then covered the open ends with some loose brambles, etc., and set off rapidly to get some one who knew enough about the vagaries of a car to come and help me.

When I returned in about an hour with a mechanic I found that death had released the wretched old man from his troubles.

I told the girl about her uncle's wishes, and that all he had was to go to her, after my bill had been paid. He owed no others.

"He's got his money hidden about, doctor. Do you know where it is?" she inquired.

"No, Polly, I haven't an idea," I replied. "But to-night, if you like, I will come over and help you to find your fortune."

"Thank you very much; you are so good to me," she answered, her words punctuated with sobs.

I drove back again after dark, and found Polly restless and agitated; she had not yet found much money.

"I should so much like a cup of coffee, and I expect it would do you good," I suggested to her.

"I will make some at once," the girl replied, and in a few minutes returned with it.

I had some laudanum with me in a small glass phial, and took the opportunity of putting a fair dose into her cup when her back was turned.

I could not remove the gold in safety unless this restless girl was kept quiet.

"I feel very tired, doctor. I think I won't trouble you any more to-night," she said before long, and we went back to the room in which the miser had died, and in a few moments Polly was in a chair—fast asleep.

Now to work again. It had been a long, trying day—even my nervous system was feeling strained, and when the gold was once

more aboard, and the 12-14 car was running smoothly home, I felt very thankful.

I saw Polly next day and she apologized for sleeping in the way she did.

Two thousand pounds, which was the amount she ultimately found, satisfied her thoroughly, but duty was paid on it, despite the wishes of the man who had collected and hoarded it to so little effect.

I'm afraid my "legacy" didn't last long. It's wonderful how money goes when you've got it in your pocket—at least, so far as I'm concerned.

CHAPTER XIII

IN WHICH MRS. AUBERON'S SECRET IS REVEALED

I WONDER, my trusted friend, if you remember that September day when you, after a consultation in Abingdon Road, lunched at my house, and we opened that bottle of most excellent '64 port which old Glynn in Campden Hill had sent me?

That same evening you, in your ignorance, would insist upon seeing me off upon a holiday from Charing Cross, though your presence on the platform cost me a first-class ticket to Paris. I tried to induce you not to come, for I had no intention whatever of going to the Continent. But you were inexorable, so I was compelled to buy a ticket and travel as far as Dover, just because I wished it to be thought that I had gone to Italy.

I had left young Saunderson in charge as *locum tenens*. You will remember him—a tall, dark, thin fellow, who drifted up and down

the country making love to every lady-patient he came across. You will remember, too, how hard-worked I had been with that epidemic of influenza, and you yourself, who had just been on holiday, suggested that I should run out to Palermo.

I know that my face was pale and drawn, and, by Jove, I think yours would have been if you had been dreading the ugly revelation of which I then stood in hourly fear. It was a case of blackmail over a certain little affair. Suffice it to say that one night I had received a knock-down blow—a visit from a woman.

A third person knew sufficient to put me into the dock at the Old Bailey!

Phew! I grow hot all over when I reflect upon it.

Well, I decided upon having a much-needed change, and, as you know, I left Charing Cross by the night-mail for Dover. But instead of crossing to Calais I slept the night at the "Lord Warden," and on the next afternoon alighted at the quiet, little old-fashioned town of Ashburton, which, perhaps you know, is situated at the end of a branch line from Totnes, in Devonshire, and, being in close proximity to the heather-clad slopes of breezy Dartmoor, is very popular as a holiday centre.

As I stepped upon the platform a smart chauffeur met me, my traps were quickly stowed into a powerful grey Daimler, and in a few moments we were tearing along the leafy Devonshire lanes, away in the direction of the Moor.

I sat back with my cigarette and reflected.

This visit of mine was, indeed, a curious one—as curious as the circumstances which had induced it.

Perhaps I had better describe them.

One night, about three months before, just as I had thrown down the evening paper with thoughts of bed, the telephone bell rang, and a woman's refined voice asked me to call at an address in Queen's Gate, a few doors from Old Brompton Road, which, as you know, is a high-class neighbourhood about half a mile from my house. Scenting a wealthy patient, I promised to go at once, and on arrival found the house a large, old-fashioned one, drab painted, with porch and deep basement.

In the drawing-room, to which I was shown by a grave, white-headed man-servant, I was greeted by a rather handsome woman of thirty in a dinner-gown of black satin and sequins, relieved by a bunch of scarlet flowers in the corsage.

"My husband has been taken very ill this evening, Dr. d'Escombe," she said, after thanking me for coming at that hour. "I would be so very grateful if you would see him."

I bowed and expressed readiness to do all in my power. Then, after a few minutes' conversation, she told me that her name was Auberon, and that they had come into the neighbourhood quite recently.

As our eyes met I noted that she was extremely handsome. I also knew instinctively that she was endeavouring to make an impression upon me.

Why is it, Brown, that women are so fond of flirting with their doctor? Ah! How many times has a pale, pinched face lying upon a pillow "made eyes" at me; how many times has a convalescent patient, sitting by her fire, put out a tiny foot and shapely ankle for my admiration. And how many times, too, has a woman sniggered provocatively when I have held my stethoscope upon her bared breast.

But enough! You know me sufficiently well to be aware that I am only a ladies'-man when I have a distinct purpose in view. The medical man who allows himself to fall beneath the blandishments of his patients of the

opposite sex is instantly a lost soul. The "dear doctor" must be ever wary, and constantly on the look-out for pitfalls spread before him by those who, eager for flirtation, are not sufficiently bold enough to do it outside their own homes. With the doctor, the confidant of the family, a secret understanding is so very easy.

Towards Mrs. Auberon I preserved a purely professional and correct attitude, and followed her upstairs into the large, handsomely-furnished room, where I found a grey, bald-headed man in pink pyjamas, much older than herself, lying in bed.

I was left alone with my patient. After a few questions which he answered in a weak voice, I made careful diagnosis, found a high temperature, took a swab from the throat, placed it in a sterile tube, and then promising to send a mixture spoke some cheery words, and left the room.

As I opened the door I distinctly heard the *frou-frou* of disappearing skirts, and knew that the sick man's wife had been listening at the door.

Having descended the stairs to the dining-room she soon joined me, all anxiety to know my opinion.

"At present, Mrs. Auberon, I fear I cannot say exactly what the complaint may be. But I shall call to-morrow, and then I shall know definitely," was my reply, and presently I left.

She sent the old butler with me for the mixture, and as he walked at my side I tried to learn what I could of his master and mistress.

"I've only been with 'em a month, sir," was the man's reply. "Mr. Auberon is a very nice gentleman, but the missus don't get on very well with young Mr. Edward. He's the master's son by 'is first wife."

"Oh! Where is he?" I asked.

"At Canterbury. He's in the Army."

"And is Mr. Auberon comfortably off?"

"Yes, doctor. I've heard from the servants that about half the town of Torquay belongs to 'im—or at least the ground it stands on."

"Do they quarrel?"

"Oh! a bit. The master keeps a tight 'and on the money, I fancy. He says she's extravagant and, my eye, 'e's right. She's never at 'ome—always in Paris, or somewhere," he replied.

Arrived at my surgery, I concocted the usual harmless mixture, and the old man departed.

Then I threw myself into my chair and lit a cigarette.

Yes. Whatever the situation was in the Auberon household, the lady was certainly very shrewd and clever. And that she had attempted to fascinate me could not be disguised. What did it mean?

Next morning I was up early. I rubbed the damp swab upon a cover-glass, dried it, and stained it with methylene blue for a few minutes. Then I washed the film, dried it, mounted it and placed it beneath my microscope.

No second glance was required to determine the nature of the disease from which Mr. Auberon was suffering. The bacilli were present in characteristic form, those slender rods, some straight, some slightly curved, their thickness being slightly greater than the tubercle bacillus—the indisputable proof of diphtheria.

When I called an hour later I carried with me some antidiphtheric serum. I was introduced to Captain Edward Auberon, the sick man's son, a tall, well-built fellow almost the same age as his step-mother.

The wife introduced him, and to them I told the result of my diagnosis. Both were

greatly alarmed, but I assured them that the administration of the serum would quickly arrest the progress of the malady, and that we must hope for the best results. I suggested the immediate engagement of a nurse, and gave certain instructions to be followed.

Suddenly Mrs. Auberon, addressing her stepson, said:

"Edward, I wish you would do me a favour, dear. Go to the telephone and ask Cox to come up and see your father at once. He's been asking to see him."

"Cox," I ventured to exclaim. "Who is he?"

"My husband's lawyer. He is worrying about something or other. Of course, doctor, you will not tell Henry what the malady is?"

"Of course not, Mrs. Auberon," I replied, looking straight into her dark eyes, for instinctively I saw that she was longing to say something, now that we were alone and the door had closed.

"Do—do you honestly believe my husband will recover?" she asked in a curious strained voice.

"I certainly believe so. The serum is generally efficacious," was my reply.

Her lower lip stiffened slightly, so slightly, indeed, that had I not been watching, I should not have noticed it.

She was silent. Her gaze was fixed out of the window. The pause was a rather awkward one. Then suddenly, after watching her for a few moments, I said with a smile :

"Forgive me, Mrs. Auberon, if I say that you do not appear—well, exactly anxious for your husband's recovery."

"What do you mean?" she cried, turning upon me, her dark eyes flashing in resentment.

"Nothing," I replied grimly. "Only—well, in some cases, you know, wives are a little tired—just a trifle weary of married life. That's all."

She bent forward in her chair, looking into my face with a fierce, intense expression.

"Ah! I see, Dr. d'Escombe—I see, now, that you are not one of those canting moralists, but a thorough-going man of the world. You judge the world by the world's standards. You have read the heart of a woman. You—you have read mine!" she admitted.

A footstep sounded outside in the tiled hall, and she started, fearing lest it should be the Captain returning.

"Listen!" she went on in a low, hoarse whisper, glancing towards the door. "It is true—true what you have surmised. I—I confess it to you. Ah! the horror of it all! But I can bear this life no longer. Henry has driven me to desperation. Quick, there's no time to lose if we are to come to an arrangement—a purely business arrangement," and she paused, suddenly growing quite calm. "You have the tube of serum in your bag. What is its price, Dr. d'Escombe?" she whispered.

I was taken aback. She had fallen into the net more quickly than I had anticipated.

"Five hundred pounds," I replied, naming the figure that first entered my mind. I was an arrant fool. I might just as well have said a thousand.

"Done!" she said. "Give it to me."

"No," I said, smiling. "I suppose you do not keep such a sum in the house. So I shall call again at five o'clock this afternoon to administer the serum. If, by that time, you have the cash ready to hand to me, I shall go away—and forget to inject it. Or better," I added, "I may perhaps inject something else."

"There will be no blunder?" she said hoarsely.

"None—on my part."

"And none on mine," was the woman's hard reply. Her dark brows were slightly knit and her lips stiffened again. Ah! how easily, my dear Brown, will an evil woman, in these days of rapid living, buy a man's life! If you had only seen half of the ugly side of matrimony as I have seen it you would be appalled and thank your stars you are a bachelor.

Five hundred pounds is surely good pay for a moment's forgetfulness. Therefore we smiled at each other in perfect agreement, and I ascended the stairs and visited my patient.

A very bad chill and swollen throat, I pronounced it to be.

"My dear Mr. Auberon," I said, "don't worry in the least. I hear you are troubling yourself over business affairs. It is all to no purpose. In a week I shall have you smoking a cigar with me. Trust in me, and I'll pull you through right enough. I've sent for a most excellent nurse—a woman I can implicitly trust—and you'll very quickly pull round again."

"You took something from my throat last night, doctor. What did you find?" he asked, looking me straight in the face.

"I made the most minute microscopical examination, and I found absolutely nothing abnormal," was my airy response.

I suppose I must have chatted with him for half an hour in the presence of his wife, and he became quite satisfied.

"It's a good job, Dora, that it isn't anything serious," he said laughing, as he fondly took his wife's hand—the hand which intended to murder him. "I really thought I was in for something very bad."

"Yes, and so did I, dear. I've been worrying all night," she replied. "But Dr. d'Escombe declares that you'll be all right again in a few days, and then we'll go down to Coombe for a month or so. The moorland air always does you so much good. So cheer up, dearest, and be patient." And she pressed his hot hand tenderly.

Her eyes met mine. Then I walked across to the window. To save the man, the serum should have been administered then and there. I knew sufficient of diphtheria to be well aware that at five o'clock it would probably be too late, even if I then administered it.

The Captain entered the room, followed by the nurse whom I had engaged by telephone. To her, I gave instructions in the presence of them both, and shortly afterwards, after calling the nurse aside and telling her the true nature of the case, I left the house.

I declare to you, old chap, that I walked back home with a lighter gait than for fully three months past. A firm of money-lenders were bothering me over a little loan, and I wanted money to settle with them. Therefore I had raised no objection to selling my little tube of serum for five hundred of "the best and brightest."

I saw my patients as usual, and at the appointed hour I had a stiff peg of whisky and returned to Queen's Gate.

In the hall I met the Captain, who accompanied me to his father's room, and watched my rather fussy investigations in silence.

I wondered whether he entertained any suspicion.

My attitude was, as before, one of cheerful optimism. The patient was, I saw, considerably worse than in the morning. He was taking his mixture regularly, but I fear it was not calculated to do him very much good. A glass of water would have been equally efficacious.

The Captain called me outside into the corridor and suggested that a second medical man should be called into consultation.

"Certainly," I said. "I have not the

slightest objection. My own idea is that the best course would be to inject the anti-diphtheric serum this evening and call in a second opinion to-morrow morning."

Delay was what I required.

My frank response satisfied him, and he named Heston Forsyth, a very good man living in Cavendish Square. Therefore I promised to telephone an appointment with him.

I was eager to have a private chat with Mrs. Auberon, but to my dismay, discovered that she was out. She had gone out on a business message for her sick husband, and would not return before seven.

Having learnt this, I decided to come back at seven and inject the serum.

Had the woman repented? Did she fear lest I might give her away? I walked back to my surgery with mixed feelings of anger and disappointment. A note lay upon my table, and I opened and read it with satisfaction.

I had not, however, been indoors half an hour when a patient was announced, and on entering the waiting-room with my best professional smile, I found Mrs. Auberon.

"I came here, doctor," she exclaimed in a low, half-frightened voice when she was seated

in my consulting room with the door closed. "I came, because I feared that Edward might overhear, or have his suspicions aroused. Have you made the injection?" she inquired quickly.

"Not yet. I have promised Captain Auberon to return at seven, in order to do so. He wishes Heston Forsyth to see his father in the morning."

"And what then——?" she gasped, staring straight at me.

"Why, nothing," I laughed. "That is if you are in the same mind as you were this morning."

"My mind is unchanged," she promptly replied with resolution. "I am here prepared to buy the serum," and from her hand-bag she produced a small roll of crisp bank-notes—the price of her husband's life.

In silence I took them, counted them, and in return handed over to her the little tube from my bag.

"But—but, doctor," she whispered hoarsely as she held it in her hand. "You will inject something—or Edward may grow suspicious."

"Of course, I shall," I replied, smiling. "The first question that Heston Forsyth will ask will be whether I have done so."

"Then you will be at the house at seven, eh?" she asked, rising from her chair, her handsome face pale and hard-set.

"I shall," was my brief response.

Then, as she put out her hand to me in farewell, I suddenly fixed her with my eyes and said:

"As we now understand each other so perfectly, Mrs. Auberon, I wonder that you are not entirely frank with me."

"Frank with you! What do you mean?" she exclaimed in surprise.

"Well, you might, for instance, acknowledge the motive of this little affair—that another man, Mr. Paul Taylor, is anxious to marry you in the event of your husband's non-recovery."

"How did you know that?" she gasped, her face blanched to the lips.

"I learnt it to-day," I said, quite coolly. "You left the house at three o'clock and kept an appointment with Taylor in the Burmese Tea Rooms, in Bond Street. Afterwards you went to a mourning warehouse in Regent Street, where you were measured for a gown, though you did not actually order one. Taking time by the forelock, Mrs. Auberon, eh?"

"You have had me watched!" she cried resentfully.

"And surely there is no harm in it all," I declared. "When dealing with a stranger it is usual, in every business, to make some inquiries. We are still friends, I hope." And I put out my hand.

She grasped it and, laughing a little nervously, declared that I had been a trifle too inquisitive.

"But never mind, Dr. d'Escombe. I trust you implicitly. You will call at seven," she added.

Then I bowed her out, extremely glad to rid myself of her presence.

The notes I locked away in my writing-table, and having prepared another tube of a perfectly harmless serum, I attended at Queen's Gate punctually at seven o'clock.

Again the Captain met me, pale and anxious, and in his presence the nurse declared that the patient was rapidly growing worse.

"I feel no alarm," I said. "I shall give the injection, and he should pull round within the next four hours."

So I ascended to the room and used my little hypodermic, filled with a perfectly harmless liquid, in the presence of the nurse, whom I intended should be my witness in case of any awkward inquiry.

Below, in the drawing-room, sat Mrs. Auberon full of anxiety. She plied me with so many questions that I was compelled to admit to myself that she was a most admirable actress. I noted with satisfaction, too, that whatever might be the strained relations between son and step-mother, the former had no suspicion of the manœuvre in progress.

I used the Aubérons' telephone to speak with Heston Forsyth, and made an appointment to meet him there at eleven o'clock next morning. For four hours I remained in the house, visiting my patient many times, and noting his progress. I declared his condition to be ameliorated, though, truth to tell, he was growing from bad to worse.

Well, to cut a long story short, when Heston Forsyth came he saw, at first glance, that the case was a very serious one, but as I had injected the serum and given the drugs usual in such cases, nothing more could be done.

We were together in the sick-room for over an hour, and afterwards meeting Mrs. Auberon and her step-son in the drawing-room he gave out a quantity of professional patter and concluded by assuring them :

"You can, I feel certain, rest assured that Dr. d'Escombe's treatment is the very best

that could have been adopted. I agree entirely with everything he has done, and we can only now hope for a speedy recovery."

I glanced at the sick man's wife, but she instantly averted her gaze.

The Captain was quite re-assured, and Heston Forsyth, having pocketed his fee, drove away.

The inevitable occurred rather sooner than I expected, for I was called up on the 'phone at one o'clock one morning, and before I could get round, Mr. Auberon had passed to that land that lies beyond the human ken.

So next day I signed the death-certificate, and two days later his remains were followed by his sorrowing widow and son and a number of friends to their last resting-place in Woking Cemetery.

In a month, my dear Brown, I had forgotten all about the affair. I possess a faculty for forgetfulness that is often very convenient. Cocaine and soda have washed many a nasty taste from my mouth.

Late one night, about eight or nine weeks afterwards, I was reading the evening paper before going to bed when a patient was shown into my consulting-room.

It proved to be Mrs. Auberon. She looked

very elegant, for her deep black suited her well.

"Dr. d'Escombe," she began in a low, frightened voice, scarce above a whisper. "I—I'm in peril. I——"

"What!" I gasped, starting up. "Is it known?"

"Not exactly. Wait, and I will explain the situation," she said as she bent eagerly towards me. "On my husband's death I found, quite contrary to my expectations, that I was left with ten thousand a year, together with Coombe Manor, our place in South Devon. I believed that it had all gone to Edward, and that I should only have a life-interest. And secondly—well, I found that Mr. Taylor and myself were not exactly suited to each other."

"I'm very sorry for that," I said. "I believed that you were devoted to each other."

"So we were—but—well, little differences arose between us, because—because—I may as well confess it—because I found out, by mere chance, who and what he really was."

"And what was he?"

"A pure adventurer."

"Phew!" and I emitted a long breath.

"And worse," she went on. "In a foolish

moment of indiscretion during my husband's illness I unfortunately told him that he would not get better—that you and I were in accord, and that I had bought the bottle of serum.”

“My God, woman!” I cried, starting to my feet. “Are you a howling imbecile?”

“You are right!” she gasped. “I was. I’ve paid for it—paid for it dearly ever since. He’s had three thousand pounds from me already.”

“You’re an infernal fool, Mrs. Auberon,” I declared openly. “And you deserve what you’ve got.”

“I know! I know!” she cried in sheer despair. “But your peril is equal with mine. I’ve paid in order to save you, as well as to save myself. He threatens to put the whole matter before Edward. If he does, then we are lost. What can I do?”

“Do? Why, pay him a lump sum and get rid of him.”

“And if I do so he will then commence to blackmail you.”

“What does he really know?” I asked calmly.

“Everything. I was a fool, and believing we were to be man and wife, told him everything.”

“He can prove nothing.”

“Ah, yes he can,” she replied. “I paid you in notes. He knows that. He knows that I got those notes from my bank. I suppose you paid them into yours?”

I was a fool to have done so. But all seemed so clear and easy at the time that I had not taken my usual precaution to change them at Cook's into foreign money, and then back into English currency at the bank.

What the woman said was only too true. Thanks to her foolish confession we were both in an uncommonly tight corner.

“Well, what is to be done?” I asked, clasping my hands behind my back.

“Done? What can we do? If I pay him off, he will come to you.”

“How much does he want?”

“He will name no fixed price. He laughs in my face and says that he intends that I shall provide him with an income for life.”

I pulled a grimace.

“I suppose he'll come to me before very long, eh?”

“No doubt he will. But we must act before that, Dr. d'Escombe. He must not suspect that I have seen you.”

“Act. How?”

"Well," and she hesitated, her fine dark eyes turned upon mine. "Well—do you leave it to me to suggest a way out?" she asked slowly.

"You did so on a previous occasion," I remarked.

A silence fell between us, broken only by the loud solemn tick of the old grandfather's clock in the corner.

"He is coming to visit me at Coombe next Saturday. Perhaps he—well, he might be taken seriously ill during his stay with me. Who knows?"

And in her eyes showed a queer, eager look. She was a woman of nerve and determination.

"Why is he visiting you?"

"It is a purely friendly visit—to talk over the future. By tacit agreement our engagement is at an end, of course."

"He has no love for you, eh?"

"None. He never had. He was after my money—by fair means or foul. That's all."

"And when he has bled you for all you are worth, he will just go to the Captain and tell him the whole story."

"That is my firm belief. For that reason I make the suggestion that certain means—may—be—found—eh?"

And as she whispered the words slowly, she glanced around the room as though in fear of eavesdroppers.

I was silent. I was lighting a cigarette.

"I thought, perhaps, you might run down to Coombe," she went on, watching me. "I go down to-morrow morning, and you could follow me the day after. You, on your part, might pretend to go on a holiday, and come to me in secret instead."

"But Taylor may be watching my movements. If so, he will be aware of your visit here to-night!"

"I think not. I have no fear of that. He's in Scotland. Say that you will come."

"Well—I will do so, if you wish to consult me professionally."

"I do. But I don't want you to cure any disease. I want you to give one—you understand?" and she grinned.

"Perfectly. You think that in our mutual interests this fellow's mouth must be effectually closed?" I said quite coolly.

"You follow me exactly, doctor. Think matters over carefully between now and Tuesday, and make preparations to go for a holiday—perhaps to the Continent. Instead of doing so come down to me. Come as Mr. Fryer,

my solicitor. None of my old servants are with me now."

I promised. Then she drank the glass of brandy-and-soda I mixed for her, and I saw her into the taxi which was waiting.

My hat, Brown! Imagine my feelings when she had gone. Here I was, once more, in an infernal hole, merely on account of a hysterical woman.

And the only way out of that *impasse* was by some subtle manœuvre whereby the man who knew would be placed *hors-de-combat*.

For hours I paced my room that night, turning matters carefully over, and trying to arrive at some conclusion as to the best means to adopt to achieve our sinister end.

You came in, Brown, to ask me about that testimonial to the organist at St. Stephen's, you will remember, and I put down my couple of guineas, which you thought so very generous where church work was concerned, did you not? It pays a medical man to be known among his patients as a good churchgoer. You know that quite well.

As Mr. Basil Fryer, solicitor, I duly arrived at Ashburton, after your unwelcome attention had sent me down to Dover, and after half an hour in the car I found myself at a big, old

country-mansion overlooking Dartmoor, where my clever hostess greeted me warmly.

We dined together *tête-à-tête* in the fine oak-panelled room, and afterwards we were closeted in the library, the servants having previously been informed of my professional capacity.

"He will occupy the room you now have," she said at last in a low voice, as she crouched near the fire, her dark, wonderful eyes fixed upon me. "I leave it to you to devise some means."

"While dressing to-night I made an examination of the room, hardly knowing what course to adopt. But a plan occurred to me at dinner. I shall explain it to-morrow, before I leave for London."

"No. Tell me now. I am all anxiety. Is there any chance of failure?"

"I think not, Mrs. Auberon," was my quiet reply. "We both of us have far too much at stake to court disaster. But—well, may I speak quite frankly?"

"Certainly. Are we not friends?"

"I am about to perform you a service, and well—one generally expects payment for such delicate work—not much, of course, but—just a slight acknowledgment. Say a sum equal to that before, eh?"

The woman looked very straight at me, and her chest heaved just a little, causing her diamond pendant to glitter.

"Five hundred," she remarked. "Well, if you really must have it I will give you a cheque when the affair is complete."

"I merely suggest it," I said. "I think that the little matter is worth that to you—is it not?"

"You are equally implicated," she exclaimed.

"But without motive. You had a motive, remember."

"You are equally culpable with me."

"That, unfortunately, does not alter the circumstances that I am just a little pushed for money," I laughed. "We doctors have, alas! to live beyond our incomes all the time. I think you will quite understand that I'm really in need of another five hundred."

"And that is all, remember."

"The last penny I shall suggest."

"You will have the cheque on the day of the unfortunate event," she said, and we rose and passed into the big drawing-room where she seated herself at the grand piano, and played several airs from the latest musical comedy.

I wanted to get away from the place, for I

had been seized by a desire for a Continental holiday after all. Saunderson was looking after things—his eye ever upon the lady patients—and with five hundred I could have a merry time for a week or two.

At last I bent over her hand and she left me, while I strolled along to the smoking-room, where the butler served my whisky-and-soda with great stateliness.

Then, after an excellent cigar, I ascended to my room.

Next morning, when I dressed I used the cake of soap from my dressing-case, in preference to the brand-new cake which I found in the soap-dish upon the dressing-room wash-stand.

By eight o'clock I had had my tub and was fully dressed. Therefore, I turned my careful attention to the dark brown cake of soap—a highly-perfumed tablet of a well-advertised variety. Fortunately for me, it possessed no antiseptic qualities. Therefore, with greatest care, I opened a small tube of culture which I had brought with me, and, with a camel-hair brush, lightly painted it over the surface of the soap.

It dried quickly, and I replaced it in its dish.

Those few strokes of the tiny brush had rendered that unsuspecting-looking cake of soap as deadly as the bite of a cobra. The culture was in glucose bouillon, and if any inquisitive person had smelt the soap he would have detected a peculiar burnt odour of the particular bacillus which I had employed. These, if submitted to the microscope, would have been found to be of drumstick form, slender organisms developing filamentous forms which could be easily identified by an expert in "bugs."

Truly a knowledge of bacteriology is of greatest use to the medical man!

Mrs. Auberon appeared at breakfast, fresh and charming in a neat grey gown of the latest mode, and surely no one would suspect her of being haunted by that terrible dread of exposure. Her face betrayed not the slightest anxiety, and it was with superb coolness that, when later on we were alone in the morning-room, she asked:

"Well, doctor, what are your plans?"

"They are already laid," I replied. "Allow your visitor to have my dressing-room—exactly as it is at present, nothing touched. Give careful instructions to the maids, and then treat your friend diplomatically for say four,

or even five, days. Allow him to believe that you are again ready to be bled. That will disarm him."

"And then?" she asked, still without a muscle of her face moving, as she stood near the fire-place.

"Wait and see," I replied with a grim smile. "Remember that clean water may be placed in the ewer and the bottle, but nothing else on the wash-stand must be touched—nothing whatever."

"Your instructions shall be carried out to the very letter," she declared. "But what may I expect?"

"After five days you may expect the inevitable," I said. "And if it occurs, I can have my cheque at once—eh?"

"Certainly, the same day, I promise you. But—but if we fail?"

"No," I said. "We cannot fail. I have accomplished my part of the affair. The rest must be left to you to entertain your visitor, and disarm all suspicion."

"You are really very mysterious," she declared, with a laugh.

"Am I? Well, in such a case it is as well sometimes not to be too open. You will learn the result of my efforts quite quickly enough.

I think you said my train left Ashburton at half-past eleven?" I added.

She glanced at the clock, and ringing the bell, told the man to get my bag. I was anxious to get back to town again, and leave for Paris by the night mail. The five hundred pounds were now as good as in my hand.

As I drove away in the car she stood in the old stone porch, and waved her hand merrily in farewell. By Jove! She was a really remarkable woman. Her self-control was unequalled.

I went first to Geneva, and then south to Naples, on my way to Palermo.

At the hotel at Naples I received a hastily-scribbled note from her to say that Taylor had been stricken by some mysterious disease. She did not trust to the telegraph, in fear lest the message should be brought up against her.

I smiled as I read her hasty scrawl in pencil. There are few men who have not some slight abrasion of the skin upon their hands or do not shave so closely that the blood is drawn. Upon a broken skin the slightest use of that tablet of soap would produce an effect as deadly as a knife wound in the heart.

Six days later, as I entered the hall of the pretty Hôtel Igiea, at Palermo, the hall-porter handed me a letter which, he said, had arrived only that morning.

It was from Mrs. Auberon, who regretted to inform me that her guest had, on the day of writing, unfortunately died of tetanus.

Enclosed was a cheque in payment of my account.

And that cheque, my dear fellow, was for the sum agreed—five hundred pounds.

Without a doubt, the fatal illness of Paul Taylor saved us both from a very unpleasant experience.

And it paid all the expenses of my Continental holiday.

CHAPTER XIV

IN WHICH THE AVENUE ROAD MYSTERY IS EXPLAINED

YOU will, perhaps, recall, my dear Brown one warm evening when you met me in the lounge of the Empire Theatre. I was with a thin, pasty-faced boy of nineteen in dinner-clothes, and with tuberculosis written plainly upon his countenance. You had just come back to London that day, after a month in Switzerland.

That night, I recollect, you chided me for ordering absinthe in the bar. I was highly amused. You believed, just as the world believed, that I was a staid and sober family-practitioner. Not so long ago such men as you and I wore coats of broad-cloth, like the family-lawyer, or the undertaker. Truly ours is a smug profession still, though we no longer affect the broadcloth and have exchanged the silk hat for the vulgar "bowler" of commerce.

I remember how that night you described to me the merry "carryings-on" of some members of a musical comedy company you had met at Zermatt, and you invited me to tea at the "Carlton" with two of your lady-friends.

True, I took absinthe that night. Three hours before—in the Café de l'Europe next door—I had taught the boy how to drink it—with a motive.

Well, I suppose I may as well tell you the story now that I have laid bare to you the secrets of my eventful life. Patients repose confidence in me, men of my own profession like yourself consult me, and women call me their "dear doctor." I wear a mask—as impenetrable as the Sphinx, I believe. And yet, Brown, I daily curse myself as a brute—and worse.

But a man must live in these hard times. The profession is over-crowded. You fellows, who lead a merry easy-going life at sea, away from letters and duns, with an ever-changing crowd of passengers and an "old man" who winks at your flirtations, can never fully realize the dreary drudgery of the unfortunate devil who practises medicine.

Nobody dreams that I practise a special—a very special—branch of it, namely toxicology.

Yes, I practise it as other men practise bone-setting or surgical operations. I know my drugs, I know my doses, and, best of all, I know the effects—all by practise. But, unfortunately, the patients I have been compelled to practise upon till I had attained proficiency have, in many cases, been carried to their grave, and there interred upon my own certificate.

But I was telling you of the boy Ronald Snell, who was with me that night in the Empire.

Well, it happened in this way.

One August morning, about half-past ten o'clock, I was in the surgery of my old friend, Doctor Thring, in Alexandra Road, St. John's Wood. He had been called up to Dundee to see his brother who was dying, and had wired asking me to look after his practice for three days. He had a large one in and around Regent's Park, Chalk Farm, Kilburn and Hampstead, and in addition held the office of divisional surgeon of police. I had known him ever since our old days at Guy's, where Golding-Bird had picked him out as a coming surgeon—and so he was. He had already made his mark, while I—well, I had, perhaps, left my mark in another direction.

I had just finished a batch of patients when the maid entered, telling me that a police-inspector in plain clothes wished to see me, and I, of course, gave orders for him to be admitted.

He was a dark-bearded, broad-shouldered man in a dark grey suit and a green Homburg hat, and on entering he told me that his name was Inspector Wills of the headquarters of the S Division of Metropolitan Police at Hampstead.

"I've called, doctor, to ask you to accompany us to a house in Avenue Road," he said. "Half an hour ago we received this by post at the station," and he handed me a single sheet of note-paper, upon which the following words were type-written :

"If the Superintendent of Police will have search made at Baronsmere House, Avenue Road, he will make a discovery. Circumstances have forced the writer to take his life, rather than face exposure and bear the punishment."

"Suicide, eh?" I remarked, handing back the letter to the inspector. "Very well, I'll come with you."

And I put on my hat and went forth into the road, where a constable in plain clothes—whose name I afterwards learnt was Saunders—stood awaiting us.

A short walk through Boundary Road and St. John's Wood Park brought us into Avenue Road, where, half-way down on the left, Wills halted, saying :

"Here we are. This is the house—the house of the mystery! I wonder what we shall find!"

"The place has been to let furnished for nearly a year, sir," Saunders remarked. "See! the board is still up. I was on this beat three months ago and, funnily enough, one night, though the place was closed, I could have sworn that I saw a light in one of those upper windows. But afterwards I decided that it was only a reflection upon the glass."

The house, a large old-fashioned detached one, stood back behind a high wall. Above its iron gate was displayed a weather-worn board, announcing that the place was to let furnished, while, seen from the road, the premises bore a faded, neglected air. The garden-paths were weedy, the beds entangled and over-grown, while the yellow blinds, all of which were drawn, were limp, dirty and discoloured.

Smartly painted well-kept houses were on either side, their gardens bright with geraniums,

dahlias and flowering creepers, therefore the dwelling in question looked very shabby and neglected in contrast.

My two companions, who had stopped before the gate, glanced apprehensively up and down the road, for they did not wish to attract attention in entering.

"It certainly does look a house of mystery," I said, when, after pretending to chat together at the kerb for a few moments, the inspector suddenly unlatched the gate and stepped inside the neglected garden.

Wills leisurely ascended the dirty moss-grown front steps; I following, while his subordinate went round to the servants' entrance. Then Wills pulled the big knob.

The bell could be heard clanging loudly within. But there was no response.

Another bell rang. It was Saunders at the back door.

Again and again the two officers rang and knocked, but nothing stirred, though both men stood listening intently, their ears strained at the doors.

I glanced around and there saw traces of recent footsteps where we stood. There was the mark of a muddy boot upon the step of the door. It must have been made by some

intruder a month before, because no rain had fallen in London during that period.

Upon the steps, and in the garden, were wisps of straw and pieces of waste paper, the drift of the London street, blown there by the wind. Old boots and rags, tossed over the wall, lay about, and amid the tangle some stunted roses, defying the disorder, were blooming.

In a few moments we went to the rear of the premises, and at the inspector's orders Saunders produced from his pocket a putty knife, and made an attempt to push back the catch of the scullery window. But the sash could not be lifted. It had been secured by two long screws passing through the sashes.

Three windows we tried, and each gave the same result, whereupon the inspector said: "We must force the door."

From his inner pocket Saunders produced a short but business-like steel jemmy of the type used by burglars—indeed, it was, they told me, one which had been found upon a member of that fraternity—and quickly commenced work upon the back door.

At first he could make no impression upon it, but after about ten minutes there was a sound of the cracking of wood, and the

sockets of the bolts being wrenched off under the leverage, the door flew open. Then we all three entered.

The kitchen showed signs of recent occupancy, for upon the table stood dirty plates and dishes, while in the range were dead cinders, and upon it stood several dirty pots and pans, showing that a meal had recently been cooked there.

"I always thought the house was empty!" exclaimed Saunders.

"We have it on the list as unoccupied," declared the inspector. "Whoever is here certainly has no right to be. Let's go on."

We ascended the kitchen stairs and searched the ground-floor rooms, finding a large, old-fashioned, heavily-furnished dining-room, where stood the remains of a meal of which three persons had partaken. The drawing-room furniture was covered with a pretty pink-and-white chintz of old design, while the library was cosy and well appointed.

In the bright sunshine of that August morning, however, the place presented a very dirty and neglected appearance. As Saunders drew up the blinds, dirt and disorder were everywhere revealed. The place had not been cleaned for many months, and the neglect

became the more apparent when we ascended the wide, well-carpeted staircase to the bedrooms above. Searching one room after another, we saw that all the beds had been slept in, the soiled bed-linen having been flung back without the beds being re-made.

Entering one of the front rooms, both men gave vent to an ejaculation of surprise, for there, in the semi-darkness, lay the crouching figure of a man upon the carpet near the fire-place.

Saunders drew up the blind, allowing the sunlight to stream in, when several strange features became revealed. The dead man's face, as he lay turned towards them, was white as marble, but shrivelled and distorted out of all recognition, while grasped in his hand was a heavy Browning revolver, one chamber of which had been discharged, the tell-tale bullet having lodged just above the heart.

I fell upon my knees and quickly examined him.

"Suicide!" I said at last. "He's been dead nine or ten hours, I should say."

"He's quite unrecognizable, Dr. d'Escombe," remarked Wills. "I've seen a good many suicides in my time, but I've never seen

such a transformation in the face before. Look at his eyes. They are narrow and drawn—like a Chinaman's!"

"Yes," I answered, calmly reflecting. I saw at once that the case was a mysterious one, though I kept my own counsel.

I judged the deceased to be about thirty. He was in well-cut evening clothes, and wore upon his finger a fine ruby ring, while in his shirt-front were two diamond studs.

Quickly the two police-officers bent and searched the body, establishing the fact that the tabs bearing the tailor's name had been cut out of the man's clothes, thus revealing a determination upon his part not to be identified.

"He'd committed some crime and feared arrest," I remarked; "that is quite apparent from his letter. Therefore, he has taken every precaution to conceal his identity."

"Didn't wish to bring scandal and disgrace upon his friends, I suppose," said Wills. "We'll search the room, Saunders."

Then, as he turned towards the dressing-table, he saw, lying upon it, a note, addressed also in type-writing, "To the Police."

He tore it open and within found a twenty-pound note, together with a slip of paper,

upon which were the words: "To defray the cost of my interment in Woking Cemetery."

I was at that moment crossing the room, when my eye caught a small ball of paper, which had been screwed up and flung into the fire-place.

I picked it up and on smoothing it out, found the words, written in a bold, round hand:

"Riddle:—The Wasp can no longer sting."

Wills, to whom I handed it, read and re-read the cryptic words.

"I wonder what that means, doctor? Can this be the wasp?" he asked, glancing at the dead man. "Or did he wish to show his defiance of somebody known as 'The Wasp'—that he can no longer be stung by him!"

"'The Wasp' is perhaps some spiteful person," I remarked.

"Yes," replied the inspector; "there seems a good deal of mystery regarding this affair."

Both my companions made a tour of the bedrooms, and the attics upstairs, but discovered nothing else to attract their attention. Saunders was sent to the station to report the gruesome find.

When he had gone Wills unlocked the front-door, and then re-ascended with me to where the dead man lay.

He was, I found, a careful and painstaking officer, popular with his men, but not particularly shrewd in the detection of crime. Being in the uniformed branch of the service, he left investigation to the officers of the Criminal Investigation Department attached to the head-quarters of his Division.

But several facts struck me as curious in this case. And as we stood there, in the presence of the dead, I tried to form some theory as to the reason of that unknown man's suicide.

The body was quite cold, therefore death must have occurred many hours before. Who was he? Why had he intruded there in that empty house, when he apparently had had money at his command, as witnessed by the twenty-pound note upon the dressing-table? And why was he so anxious to announce his defiance?

While standing there in silence in the presence of that dead man with the queerly distorted face—contracted it seemed into a weird, hideous grin—I formed the conclusion that, whoever he was, he had actually been in imminent peril of arrest. Somebody, probably the person referred to as "The Wasp," had given away his secret. And his open defiance was

now shown by that scrap of paper. "The Wasp can no longer sting!" Why? Because his victim was dead.

But that distorted countenance puzzled me greatly.

Again I examined the wound, and saw at once that it was a mortal one. The muzzle of the pistol had been held close against the shirt front, the hole in which was brown and blackened.

By the remains of food in the dining-room, he had had two companions there. Who were they? Surely they would come forward and make some statement.

"It's a complete mystery, Dr. d'Escombe, isn't it?" exclaimed the inspector, turning to me.

It certainly was, and it had greatly aroused my curiosity. But, determined to investigate matters myself, I affected indifference and said:

"Merely a case of suicide during temporary insanity. I'll make the post-mortem this afternoon, if you'll have the body removed to the mortuary."

"Very well, sir," was the man's reply. "But you didn't go up into the attics, doctor, did you?"

I replied in the negative.

"I'd like you to see one room, doctor, if you don't mind coming up," he said, and I followed him to the top of the house, where we entered a long room, with sloping roof, in which I saw some steel cog-wheels and several pieces of frames of machines, the nature of which it was impossible to determine.

"It looks as though this was used as a workshop," I said.

"Yes, that's just the point, doctor."

"An inventor's workshop—a mad inventor, probably," I said.

"I must call Syms, our C.I.D. man," the inspector said, "and I shall leave it to him."

"There's little to leave," I declared with a laugh. "The man was evidently wanted on a criminal charge and simply shot himself to escape arrest, giving your people notice of his intentions. He says so in his letter to the Superintendent. He was probably some crank inventor."

"All we have to determine is the cause of death," Wills remarked.

"That's easily settled," I said. "Bullet-wound, self-inflicted."

And with my pronouncement the estimable official expressed himself entirely satisfied.

I walked back to Thring's house in Alexandra Road, full of serious reflections.

The word "Riddle" kept recurring to me. I had certainly seen it several times recently, but where, I could not for the life of me recollect.

Suddenly, just as I entered the house, I remembered. I had noticed it in an advertisement in the *Morning Post*.

I rushed into the waiting-room, where a copy of that day's paper lay upon the table and searched it.

Yes! In the "agony" column was an advertisement—a copy of those very words written upon that discarded scrap of paper—a declaration that "The Wasp" could no longer sting!

Half an hour later I drove in Thring's car down to the office of the paper in the Strand, and there searched diligently through the files for the past six months.

In them I found nearly a dozen different cryptic communications to "Riddle," but so carefully worded that of none could the actual meaning be determined.

Unknown to Wills, I had, while in that house of mystery, made one discovery. I had found in one of the leather seats of the

dining-room chairs a hair-pin, which went to show that one of the man's companions at that last meal of which he had partaken had been a woman. In addition, Wills had failed to notice that, behind the couch in the drawing-room, there lay a crumpled piece of pale salmon coloured ribbon-velvet. It had a hook on one end and an eye on the other. Therefore, it had been worn around the woman's hair, and had probably fallen off unnoticed.

Who was the woman?

With the assistance of a local medical man named Neale I made a post-mortem, and we at once declared it to be a case of suicide—a verdict which the coroner's jury returned unanimously next day.

But nobody knew that, for the purposes of further investigation, I had preserved in a phial a small quantity of the blood of the unidentified suicide.

Inspector Syms, the officer of the Criminal Investigation Department attached to the head-quarters of the S Division at Hampstead, told me that the owner of the house called Baronsmere was a retired stockbroker named Charlesworth. It had been let three years ago on a ten years' lease to a German importer

named Heinrich Otto, who, unknown to the owner, was apparently trying to sub-let it furnished. Otto, who paid the rent regularly, had returned to Hamburg a year before, leaving the house in the hands of local agents, while Mr. Charlesworth resided somewhere down in Cornwall.

Herr Otto was described as a short, stout, fair-headed man of forty-five, who wore round, gold-rimmed spectacles. But even though the features of the suicide were so distorted, they could not have in any way resembled those of the German.

The mystery, though dismissed by police and public, was, to me, a most remarkable and interesting one, because I had established one amazing fact most clearly—a fact utterly unsuspected and yet astounding.

I had made a discovery, and saw that, if I exercised a constant vigil, I might possibly turn my knowledge to considerable monetary advantage.

You know, my dear Brown, that I'm in a chronic state of being hard-up. I was then. I wanted money, and I had devised a deep scheme to secure it.

Well, that night, and for a good many nights afterwards I haunted the Avenue Road.

Fortunately the papers were too occupied with the Camden Town mystery to take any notice of a mere suicide in an unoccupied house, hence no public curiosity had been aroused, and I was able to pursue my nocturnal vigils without let or hindrance.

Thring had buried his brother and returned, therefore I had gone back to my own practice in Cromwell Road, and each evening, after I had seen the last of my patients, I changed my attire and took a taxi up to St. John's Wood to continue my weary watch.

It was a mere toss-up. I might succeed, if only my usual good luck would follow me. But there were a great many chances against me.

By Jove! I was desperately hard-up at the time. The fine pearl pin I wore in my cravat only cost half a crown and my emerald ring—the one you admired so much one day—was bought for a sovereign. All the little bits of jewellery I possessed had gone to safe keeping. Really, I don't know what our most honourable profession is coming to when a hard-working man like myself—and a favourite among the ladies—can't get a living. If it had not been for my trusty little hypodermic I should have gone under long ago.

I daresay that, having read my confessions so far, you have begun to feel that I was a dangerous man. But not half so dangerous, I assure you, as some men who practise medicine—and profit by it. Know your drug, know your dose, and know its effect, and you can, with the aid of your hypodermic, play with men and women just as you please. The world itself is but a plaything in the hands of the clever practitioner who specializes in toxicology. Oh, yes, Brown! I could tell you some things even stranger than those I have written down here in the silent watches of the night. But I have refrained, because I fear that certain unscrupulous persons who may read these lines might be tempted to make similar experiments upon their fellow-men.

My little hypodermic, which lies here in its well-worn case as I write, has been my best friend throughout my career. It has brought to me more money in five seconds than I can earn by practise in five years. By its marvellous aid I can make the old feel young, and the miser generous; the sad will yell with side-splitting laughter, and the merry will become full of grief; the careful will gamble, and the good staid woman will cast virtue to the winds. Can any weapon be more terrible in

the hands of a man who is hard-up, and who is not hampered by conscience?

Ah, Brown, I often think how many practitioners are, like myself, compelled to keep up appearances upon a limited income, and in addition, most probably, have some secret feminine entanglement. To the doctor are confessed the family secrets, and well—in many cases, he can, if he so wishes, profit very considerably by his knowledge.

I was telling you, however, of how I watched that dark, unlit, neglected house in Avenue Road—watched it nightly from dark until dawn—and yet without result.

I suppose quite a fortnight must have gone by when one overcast night, at about half-past one, while in a shabby suit and golf-cap, I lounged at the corner of Avenue Road, I saw a taxi stop about a hundred yards away, and from it there descended a man, with an old woman in a black bonnet and shawl.

They paid the driver, and the cab having moved off, the pair strolled along slowly towards where I was standing in the shadow, and suddenly entered the gate of the tenantless house.

Their actions surprised me, and my curiosity being aroused, I crept along the pavement

and watched them silently ascend the front steps and carefully let themselves in with a latch-key.

When the door had closed, I stood wondering what course to pursue. Here, most certainly, were the intruders who came at night to that empty house with some secret design.

As I watched, I saw upon the blinds of the dining-room the flash of an electric torch. The light showed from room to room. They appeared to be searching the house. The situation was a peculiar one. If I alarmed the police, then my own scheme would at once be negated. So I watched and waited.

Presently, after twenty minutes or so, the young man emerged stealthily and descended the steps. He would have encountered me had I not previously taken the precaution to conceal myself inside the small garden.

Then I made a sudden resolve. The old woman was alone within, so I would enter and demand an explanation.

I got in by the pantry window—which I had purposely unlatched and unscrewed when inside with the detectives—and crept upstairs to the dining-room, where a faint light showed. Peering through the crevice of the door, I

saw the hook-nosed old woman, her bonnet and shawl removed, seated at the table with a lighted candle, carefully counting a number of bank-notes.

The dim light falling upon her revealed a thin, careworn, wrinkled face, with dark, deep-sunken eyes, high cheek bones and grey hair—an evil, repulsive countenance. Her long, brown hands fingered the notes as she murmured to herself in counting. Upon the table lay a shabby leather vanity-bag from which she had apparently taken the large sum she was counting.

Suddenly, without warning, I stepped into the room and confronted her.

She grabbed the notes beneath her hand, and sat staring at me, open-mouthed, immovable as a statue.

“Well, madam!” I exclaimed in a hard voice. “Perhaps you will explain your presence here in this house, eh?”

“Explain!” she cried. “Why should I? Who are you?”

“I am a person, madam, who knows your secret,” was my reply. “A man who, if you so desire, is ready and anxious to help you, and become your friend.”

“Why do you wish to become my friend,

pray?" she inquired incredulously in a thin, croaking voice.

"Well—you would prefer me as friend, rather than enemy, I suppose?" was my meaning reply.

She had hastily swept up the bundle of notes and replaced them in her shabby bag.

"I don't know you, sir," said the old woman, "and, moreover, I don't want to know you."

"Probably not—because I could blow this whistle and give you at once into custody," I said with a dry laugh.

The old woman's eyes narrowed perceptibly, and she started at my words.

"This house is a house of secrets," I went on, "and the police are extremely anxious to discover what really happened here one night about three weeks ago. They are still in ignorance—but I alone know."

"You know!" gasped the woman, staring at me.

"Yes. I know that a certain young man found in this place did not shoot himself. He was enticed here—and then deliberately murdered. Madam, I give you and your friends due credit for a wonderful astuteness and knowledge. The whole plot was really remark-

able, and the simulation of suicide perfect. The typed letter to the police, the draft advertisement, the previous announcements in the *Morning Post*, all show that, controlling this sinister business, there is some master mind. I want to meet him. Who is he?"

"Very likely that I would tell—eh?" she laughed.

"Better tell me," I said. "You know his secrets, hence you will sooner or later die, as all who have known his secrets have died by some subtle and unsuspected means—died like that young man died."

It was a wild shot of mine, but the old woman gave vent to a low, harsh laugh.

"I think not," she said confidently. "I can take care of myself."

"And the young man who has just left this house is marked down as the next victim—eh?" I asked in a low, dry tone.

She was silent for a moment. Then she raised her thin, intelligent face to mine, and said:

"I realize that, whoever you are, you know something."

"My name is More d'Escombe. I am a medical man," was my brief reply. "It is true that I am in full possession of the means

employed to encompass the death of that poor fellow upon whom I made a post-mortem."

"You know—the truth!" she gasped, her bony cheeks blanched, her hands trembling as she clutched the edge of the table, her dark eyes staring at me in horror.

"I do," was my cold response, as I gazed in triumph full in her face. "I will be quite frank with you, and so you must be frank with me." I went on, "I have myself had some little experience with the drug used. I know its dose, and also its effect. The expression upon the dead man's face alone told to me the plain truth. Who was he? What was his name?"

She refused to answer; my words seemed to hold her paralysed in fear.

"Come," I said. "We are alone here. And—well, I may, I suppose, be perfectly open with you—I'm prepared to assist you if it is made worth my while. If not—then we may as well remain strangers."

I had seen that bundle of notes in her hands, and sight of them had aroused within me that fatal avarice which has, alas! more than once been so nearly the cause of my undoing.

"Come," I repeated. "What was his name?"

"Lionel Wray," she blurted out, feeling that further resistance was useless, in view of the knowledge I possessed.

"He was enticed here and robbed—as others have been," I said, looking straight into her face. "Who is your male friend? Not that boy who has just left you," and then, in order to emphasize my coolness, I took out a cigarette and lit it.

"My friend is dead," she said. "He died suddenly in Paris a week ago—the result of an accident."

"A bad accident?"

"No, a slight scratch."

"And his was the master-mind, eh?"

"He was a medical man, like yourself, Dr. More d'Escombe," responded the old woman, looking straight at me.

"And he killed himself by accident—eh? Confess it."

"Yes," she responded. "That is unfortunately the truth."

"And you are now in need of a friend?"

"I am."

"Some other person knows the secret of this house," I said. "Who is he?"

I was wondering from what source that tempting bundle of notes had been derived,

and whether some of them could not be transferred to my own pocket.

"That young man, Ronald Snell, who came here with me. He is the son of the man who died in Paris. He—well," and she lowered her voice, "the fact is, he knows too much."

"And it would be to your advantage if——"

"Yes, if—if something happened," she whispered quickly.

"Ah, I see," I exclaimed, fully realizing her meaning. "But what does he know?"

"Everything. His father—whose real name was Heinrich Otto, but who sometimes took the name of Snell—foolishly let him into the secret of the business transacted here—a paying business, doctor," she laughed.

"What was that?"

"The printing of these," and she touched the little handbag containing the bank-notes.

"Then Otto was a forger?" I exclaimed in surprise, suddenly recollecting the pieces of discarded machinery in the attics.

"Otto was a German doctor, who was also an expert engraver. He prepared the notes, while I travelled across the Continent and changed them. A year ago, however, the

suspicious of the Paris police became aroused and I was followed back here to London. Whereupon Otto closed the house, put up the board to let and fled to Germany. Then, when all suspicion had died down, he returned and lived in rooms in Camden Town, only visiting this place at night. For what reason you may guess."

"Men were enticed here, drugged and robbed," I said.

She nodded in the affirmative.

"Lionel Wray was not the only person who lost his life in this house, no doubt. A man who knew the exact dose of ergotonin, as this Otto did, must have practised upon other victims," I said.

"Then you know the drug?" exclaimed the old woman with a queer, harsh laugh. "You know something of drugs?"

"I do—perhaps as much as your friend Otto did."

"Then you will help me, Dr. More d'Escombe?" she said quickly. "Five thousand pounds to your bank on the day that young Ronald breathes his last."

I hesitated. She might so easily back out of her part of the bargain. My main object was a sum in advance.

"You're offer is certainly rather tempting, Mrs.——"

"Netherall," she interrupted.

"Well, Mrs. Netherall," I said, "I hardly yet understand why you are so very anxious to rid yourself of the boy."

I wanted to learn the whole story.

"I require your assistance, doctor, and I'm prepared to pay for it," replied the crafty old woman, whose keen, dark eyes glittered with evil in the candle-light. "I know that you were called in by the police when they found young Wray. It was a master-stroke of old Otto's. The police believed it to be a case of suicide in order to avoid arrest."

"But there were circumstances which might easily have aroused suspicion," I pointed out. "A meal had been eaten at this table, and the remains left. Why?"

"Old Heinrich laughed at the police. He typed the letter, and posted it himself. He always declared that the police were idiots, and was fond of proving it."

"But the advertisements. Who was 'Riddle?'"

"A riddle of his own creation. He invented it in order to mystify and mislead the police."

I explained how, recognizing the poison used, I had watched the house each night.

"Not every night," she laughed. "Three times at least you have missed, for we've been here on three occasions."

"What was the motive of getting rid of young Wray?" I asked.

"The same as the others. To close his lips. He was a clerk at a money-changer's in Moor-gate Street, and he one day recognized Otto as a man who had exchanged at a *bureau de change* in Calais, two forged thousand-franc notes for English gold. Otto became friendly and Wray sought, of course, to learn more. He accepted an invitation to supper here, intending to give away his friend to the police next day. But—well, he did not live to do so, that's all!"

"Several persons have, I suppose, been assisted out of the world in a similar manner by Otto?" I remarked.

She nodded with an evil grin.

"Why do you fear his son? Surely he should fear you, Mrs. Netherall?"

"No. In this house, up in the attic, Heinrich Otto had seventy thousand pounds' worth of forged French notes concealed—notes which he printed before he gave up the work

and cleared out the machinery—as well as two thousand pounds in genuine English bank-notes. I knew their hiding-place and, daring detection, I came here and took them a week ago. Unfortunately, however, the old man, before he left England, told his son where they were. The boy is searching for them, and suspects me of stealing them. If I do not refund them he will go to the police and tell them the whole truth.”

“H’m. Pretty awkward for you, eh? I suppose he can tell them some rather queer stories.”

“He can. And the worst of it is that the infernal boy has clean hands.”

I rose from the chair where I had been sitting, and, assuming my stiffest professional manner, said:

“I’m afraid that it is not in my power to assist you, Mrs. Netherall. I much regret it.”

“Not if I give you five thousand pounds in good notes—in gold if you like. You are a clever doctor, and surely the little affair would not be difficult.”

“Madam, I am not in the habit of performing such services,” I said in stern rebuke.

“What?” she gasped, staring at me in horror as she rose. “You refuse?”

"As far as I can see my best course is to make a statement to the police," I said, my manner entirely changed.

"To give me away!" she cried. "I—I thought you were my friend."

But I only lit another cigarette, laughing in her ugly face.

Her wrinkled countenance went pale as death. Then, a second later, she turned crimson in anger.

"Dr. d'Escombe, you are, indeed, clever. You have induced me to make a clean breast of the affair, and having done so, you refuse to help me."

"Madam," I said in a low, earnest tone, "I am an honourable man. I do not take human life without compunction, as did your German friend."

"But surely your scruples can be put aside? Five thousand pounds is a substantial sum, remember."

"And you will profit how much? You have French notes of the face value of seventy thousand. If they are worth anything at all you can get fifty thousand for them from persons who, like yourself, deal in such commodities. And you offer me five thousand!"

"It is a good fee for five minutes' work, is it not?"

"The work would take less, but the risk is life-long."

"You don't trust me?" she exclaimed, looking at me with a hard, evil expression.

"Well, we were strangers till half an hour ago," I replied.

"And if I increased the figure how would you propose to act?"

"Ah! I should have to first make the young gentleman's acquaintance and diagnose his case," I said with a smile.

But she remained silent. She evidently did not intend to put down any sum in advance. By Jove, old chap! I was desperate at that moment, fighting against bankruptcy day after day. Still, as you know, I never believe in tracking small game. So I affected complete indifference.

"I'll increase it by another thousand," the old woman croaked at last.

"Two thousand paid down now," I insisted.

"If you wish," was her answer with some reluctance. "But this is blackmail!"

"To-morrow will do. But my figure is two thousand down for silence and assistance. I will meet you anywhere by appointment. The bank-notes in this house are not altogether to my liking. I'm perfectly candid," I laughed.

"These are all right," she declared, pointing to her bag. "But, if you wish, I'll meet you to-morrow at eleven o'clock outside Westminster Station, on the Embankment. You can then take the notes to any bank and change them."

"And five thousand this day week?"

"If the desired event has occurred by then."

I saw a blotting pad upon the sideboard, and crossing to it got her to write a few scribbled lines of agreement, which she duly signed.

Then taking leave of her I left the house of mystery.

The manner in which Lionel Wray had been killed and the way in which the affair had been made to simulate suicide betrayed the artist. That was certainly not the first occasion on which Heinrich Otto had used ergotonin with criminal intent. He had been aware—by demonstration most probably—of its action in instantly arresting the flow of the blood, of producing a marble-like pallor, and of contracting the superficial muscles of the face, thereby rendering the victim unrecognizable even by his nearest friends. The drug had been administered first, and directly afterwards the shot had been fired and the

weapon placed in the dead man's hand, the muscles of which had afterwards contracted.

Yes. The more I reflected upon Heinrich Otto, the more did I wonder to what extent he had used his toxicological knowledge. He had, no doubt, been a perfect artist in his branch of the profession.

Next morning at eleven I met the old woman at Westminster, and from her received twenty Bank of England notes for one hundred pounds each, which, a quarter of an hour later, I deposited at my own bank in Fleet Street, thus finding myself with a welcome balance.

In that hour the fate of young Ronald Snell was sealed.

Next day, while in the bar of the Leicester Lounge, in Leicester Square, I managed to scrape up an acquaintance with him. At first he was rather shy of me, but thanks, perhaps, to my ultra-respectable appearance and sedate manner, we quickly became on friendly terms.

I had taken a bedroom and sitting-room at the Savoy Hotel, and on the following day he called to see me. He dined with me, and we went out to the White City afterwards. Next day and the next we met, for I took pains to ingratiate myself with him. He was

a silly boy, even though well versed in the vices of London life. In ignorance of my acquaintance with Mrs. Netherall, his late father's accomplice, he led me to believe that he was the son of a Manchester merchant, and that his slight German accent had been acquired during his school-days at Wiesbaden.

On the night you met me at the Empire, we had dined together at the Savoy, and perhaps you may have noticed that he was without gloves. He had left them behind in the sitting-room.

Something of a dandy, Ronald Snell, son of the great forger and toxicologist, was most particular about his gloves—pale grey suède ones. Only when in a taxi on our way to the Empire did he discover, to his annoyance, that he had left them behind.

"Never mind, my dear fellow. You'll go back with me to supper, and then you can get them," I said reassuringly.

That afternoon I had introduced him to absinthe while we had sat at one of those little tables in the Café de l'Europe, in Leicester Square. After we left you we returned there, and he had yet another absinthe. I was trying an experiment.

Then we took a taxi to the Savoy, where

we had supper and sat afterwards sipping curaçoa, watching the half-world of London, and listening to the Roumanian band.

Upon my companion the combination of absinthe and champagne had already had its effect. He was bright and merry, declaring that, thanks to me, he had spent a most delightful day.

When the lights went down and a warning voice announced that the time-limit had expired, we ascended in the lift to my sitting-room.

"You want your gloves," I said. "There they are."

They were lying upon the sideboard, where he had left them, but as he drew on the left hand one he exclaimed in a thick, indistinct voice :

"By Jove! Why—why a beastly pin has got into the thumb! And I've pricked myself badly."

And he drew off the glove quickly and examined his thumb beneath the light. Upon the puncture was a tiny bead of dark blood.

I glanced at it critically, and then laughing, declared :

"Oh, that's nothing," and looking at the pin, added : "It isn't rusty, so there can be no danger."

"Well," he said, "you're a doctor, so you ought to know," and he laughed an idiotic laugh. Then slowly he replaced the glove, while I cast the offending pin into the fire-place.

For the next three days we were inseparable, but on the fourth morning I received a message over the telephone from his rooms in Down Street, saying that he was feeling very unwell and asking me to call.

I went, and as soon as I saw him I felt inwardly satisfied.

"Not quite the thing, eh?" I exclaimed cheerily, feeling his pulse.

"No, d'Escombe. I feel horribly ill," the young fellow declared. "Look at my thumb; I believe I've poisoned it somehow."

It was red and inflamed, but, fortunately, owing to the alcohol he had consumed at the Savoy, he had no recollection of the slight pin-prick.

"It certainly looks a bit red," I said. "I'll go out to the chemist's and get something to dress it with."

Presently I bandaged it with a little harmless ointment, and assured him he would be better on the morrow.

Next day, however, I found a marked

constitutional disturbance, together with an eruption on the surface of the body.

He had noticed it and suggested that Dr. Macdonald, a medical man he had consulted before, and who lived in Paddington, should be called. To this I raised no objection. Therefore, my estimable colleague saw him, made an independent diagnosis, and was much puzzled next day by the eruption which had at first appeared papular and was now assuming a pustular form. He found the nasal mucous membrane secondarily infected, and thence inflammatory swelling was spreading to the tissues of the face.

When we consulted, Macdonald acknowledged himself in complete ignorance of the disease from which the patient was suffering, an ignorance which, of course, I also affected.

As day succeeded day, Macdonald attended him, but he grew no better. His symptoms were of rapid pyæmia, and on the ninth day Ronald Snell breathed his last, while both Macdonald and his partner, a man named Booth, were, as I expected, utterly at a loss to diagnose the actual disease.

They were unaware that the pin in the young man's suède glove had been infected with a stroke culture I had carefully incubated

on potato, the bacillus of glanders—a malady which is extremely difficult to diagnose. Fortunately, the truth was quite unsuspected, or they would have applied mallein, and by its means discovered the inoculation.

Thus did I assist the son of Heinrich Otto, the expert toxicologist, out of the world, and on the day of his burial in Highgate Cemetery, I became the richer by five thousand pounds.

I have often wondered what became of old Mrs. Netherall. I have never seen her since that afternoon when we parted outside my bank in Fleet Street, where I had paid in the bank-notes which she handed to me in acknowledgment of my services.

My vigil upon that tenantless house in Avenue Road was certainly a long and tedious one, but surely my patience was well rewarded.

I spent the month of October at Monte Carlo, just for another little flutter, and in order to get some nasty tastes out of my mouth. But bad luck dogged me once again, for I, alas! lost every sou at the tables—all except a couple of hundred.

I've often thought it curious that such little windfalls to a doctor do him so very little good.

CHAPTER XV

IN WHICH I MAKE A LITTLE PRESENT

ONE afternoon, at the feast in honour of the wedding of Shiela Warren, a patient of mine who lived with her parents in Longridge Road, Earl's Court, I was introduced to Mr. James Farnell.

A stout, red-faced, pompous old gentleman, he greeted me affably, and we had a long chat in the corner of the crowded drawing-room.

Only recently I had pulled the bride through a very severe attack of scarlet-fever, and the thanks of the family, and of the young man who was that day the bridegroom, had been showered upon me. The girl now standing, handsome and radiant, in her bridal gown, had very nearly gone under. Indeed, one night I had left that house, feeling that I should not see her again alive. Yet, with that perversity which Nature so often asserts, she

had taken a sudden turn, and had grown rapidly well.

Her parents had been anxious to give her a change, therefore, disregarding infection, I sent her down to an hotel at Eastbourne, and I was not really surprised when, two or three weeks afterwards, there had been a mysterious outbreak of the same disease in that establishment.

But I said nothing, neither did any of the Warren family.

James Farnell, who was father of the bridegroom, invited me to visit him in Fitzjohn's Avenue, Hampstead, where he lived.

Later on, while chatting with the bride's father after the pair had left for their honeymoon, I learnt that Farnell senior was a wealthy man who dabbled in the City, and was director of two important companies, and chairman of a big shipbuilding firm at Gateshead.

Strange, Brown, what an attractive scent money always has for me.

As soon as I knew that he was really wealthy—and not one of those useless ones who live up to every penny of their income—I resolved to cultivate his acquaintance. Hence, three days later, I called at the big, red-brick, detached house half-way up the hill from

Swiss Cottage, and took tea with his dark-haired wife and his daughter Edith, a tall, fair girl of about seventeen.

Upon that, my first visit to that artistic, well-appointed house, I detected that Farnell was a faddist—one of those men of middle age who are ever anxious about their health and weight, and ever suspicious that there may be something the matter with their heart.

Such men are constant sources of income to the medical man. The family-practitioner always cultivates their acquaintance, for they mean nice little quarterly accounts. The faddist will not repulse his doctor from looking in "just to see that he's all right," even though he may be passing on his way to another patient. And as "every picture tells a story," so does "every visit mean a fee."

Well, I soon began to know all about Farnell's complaints, both real and imaginary. He let fall that he had had several bad "goes" of fever in the tropics; therefore I attributed all his ailments to the weakness left by malaria, and advised him to be most careful.

I smiled when he explained to me how his rheumatism had been treated by a man whom I knew to be a charlatan, and though I

pretended to agree that such treatment might be beneficial, I added:

"The relief can only be temporary, and if you were to ask me candidly, Mr. Farnell, I should say that you have not been in the best of hands. This exercise and golf, and such like can do you no good. You are not strong enough for it."

"Don't you think so?" he asked, looking at me in alarm.

"No, I don't."

"Examine my heart, Dr. d'Escombe. I wish you would—and tell me your candid opinion."

Unfortunately, I had not my stethoscope with me, but I promised that I would make a professional visit next morning, if he wished it.

He was eager and anxious. Smiling within myself I saw that I had landed another fish into my net.

Well, the outcome of my visit next day was to alarm him slightly, and at the same time promise him a complete cure.

"If you carry out my treatment you'll be a new man in six months," I assured him. "You're run down. You've not been treated as you should have been. I don't like your heart at all. But we can soon have it right again. No exercise, remember. Don't walk

up-hill or upstairs too quickly. Save yourself all the exertion you can. And as for your rheumatism, it can be quite cured by judicious application of electricity. I know a most excellent man. I'll see him myself, and if you go down to him twice or three times a week for a month or two, you'll be able to move your hands as well as I can."

"Do you really think so, Dr. d'Escombe?" asked the old chap, his face brightening.

Though he did not drink port himself, he kept a splendid cellar, and the glass of wine he ordered for me was perfect.

From that day forward, for five whole months I saw him twice a week. Sometimes he would motor down to Cromwell Road to see me. You met him once in my smoking-room, I remember.

The summer days were stifling in London, and he longed to get to Vichy. But I kept him carefully at home, for did not every visit mean a fee?

He was a cute old man. But my professional patter and my air of deep concern deceived him, as it had deceived many a cleverer man. Fortunately, he had a slight affection of the heart, and this, I, of course, magnified until at the end of five months he

felt himself liable to expire suddenly at any moment.

Mrs. Farnell was a mere cipher in the house. He was devoted to his daughter Edith, and, by Jove! I never knew a smarter or cleverer girl. She had been to school in Dresden, and was saturated with German philosophy, which ill became her, pretty and "fluffy" as she was.

Once, when I had paid a visit to her father, I found her alone in the morning-room, standing by the window.

She turned upon me like a young tigress, and with flashing eyes exclaimed:

"Look here, Dr. d'Escombe, I don't think you are treating Dad fairly. You are making him believe he's horribly ill, and I'm sure he isn't!"

I looked the girl straight in the face, much surprised.

"I have no knowledge of treating your father unfairly, Miss Farnell," I replied. "Indeed, I don't follow you."

"You are making him believe he's really ill, and I, for one, don't believe it," she declared angrily. "He could walk, shoot, play golf, and take exercise before he consulted you, and now—why, he's a perfect invalid."

The girl saw through me. In an instant I realized how shrewd she was, even though she might be one of those flighty ones who, in the afternoon, wander across the Heath from "Jack Straw's Castle" towards the "Spaniards," and sit upon the seats, displaying neat ankles, and eyeing the men who chance to pass by.

"I fear you are mistaken," I laughed. "Your father has been much worse than he imagined. He has been keeping himself very quiet, it is true; but he'll find the benefit of it next year."

I had known all along that she disliked me. Why, I could not tell. Her brother's wife had sung my praises many times, for to my efforts she certainly owed her life. And yet this girl suspected my treatment of her silly old father.

How she had so completely read me, was a perfect mystery.

I pretended to treat her hostility with utter unconcern, and laughingly declared that she would very soon discern an improvement in her father's general health.

For another month I continued to give him innocuous tonics, while the electrical expert gave him light baths and other treatments of his own invention. So, between us, we were

making a very good thing out of him. His cheques came in very useful, I can tell you, my boy. But I was in sore want of a few hundreds just then, and was carefully scheming how I could get them.

That infernal rubber boom caused me to rush into speculation, like it did so many others, and now the day of reckoning was, alas! fast approaching.

I found myself once again in desperate straits. I was hard-worked, too, for just at that time another epidemic of influenza had broken out.

Old Farnell was a very hard nut as regards money matters, or I would have asked him point-blank for a loan. But I saw it was useless. He had given his son a handsome present on his marriage, and was for ever referring to it, declaring that he could ill-afford it.

Many men who are rich, plead poverty. Therefore I only smiled.

One autumn morning, however, when I called to visit him, the maid told me that he was in the small room at the end of the passage, an apartment which he called his business-room. Being so constantly in the house I walked along, and was about to push

open the door when I was startled to hear within men's voices raised in anger.

I listened and overheard a stranger exclaim in a hard tone, but quite audibly:

"Well, Farnell, I've put the truth quite plainly before you, much as I regret it. You'll have to pay, or else face prosecution. You are my friend, and I alone know the truth. You put things square, then I'll remain silent, and nobody will know."

"Yes, and you might blackmail me later on, eh?"

"I think you know me well enough, after ten years, to be certain that I should never do that!" snapped the other.

"What I know of you, Davies, is nothing much to your credit," replied my patient in a low voice. "But I may as well admit the truth of all you've said, and be perfectly frank."

"And how do you propose squaring it up? Your defalcations amount, roughly, I think, to nearly eleven thousand pounds."

"I haven't got the money," declared old Farnell.

"But you've had it and thrown it away on the Stock Exchange."

"Who knows that I've had it beside yourself?"

"Nobody. Who can know?" replied the man addressed as Davies, while I listened to the conversation with breathless interest.

There was a long pause, during which I heard a match being struck.

"And what is the latest time before the money need be paid?"

"A month—not a day later."

"And nobody knows that I have had the money, except yourself, eh? Are you quite certain of that?" Farnell repeated.

"Positive. I alone hold the proof, my dear sir."

"I know. And without that proof nothing could possibly be brought against me," my patient said.

"You are not treating me quite fairly, Farnell," the other complained. "I came here in your own interests—in order to give you an opportunity of putting matters straight before the truth leaks out."

"I know. But I can't find eleven thousand in an hour."

"You can in a month."

"Yes—I suppose I must. Well, have a drink," and the master of the house rang the bell.

I stepped back along the hall, and entered

the morning-room to wait until his visitor departed.

He emerged soon, a thin, pale-faced, rather round-shouldered man of forty-five, wearing gold pince-nez. I was careful he should not see me, though I got a good glance at his face, both as he crossed the hall and again as he passed the window on his way out.

Instantly I came forth from the room, and meeting Farnell, said :

"I heard you were engaged, so thought I'd wait."

"Yes, doctor, come in," he snapped, and led the way back to his den. He was quite unlike his usual self, and treated me with considerable abruptness.

We were seated together with the door closed when I suddenly looked him straight in the face, and said :

"You are not quite yourself this morning, Mr. Farnell. This excitement is not good for you."

"Excitement ! What do you mean ?"

"Well, the excitement of having such a visitor," I replied meaningly and rather slowly.

He started up, staring at me in blank astonishment.

"What do you mean, d'Escombe ? What—what do you know ?"

"I know that man's name, and the reason of his visit," was my cool reply. "The fact is, I heard your voices raised and I was compelled to listen—to hear those allegations he made against you."

"By Heaven!" he gasped, sinking back in his chair. "Then—*then you know!*"

I nodded in the affirmative.

"But you can surely trust me with your secret, Mr. Farnell?" I exclaimed. "Indeed, if I can be of any service I will act most willingly. You may rely upon my entire discretion."

He looked straight at me for some moments without replying. His face had grown pale, and a curious, haggard expression showed in his eyes.

"Ah!" he sighed at last. "If you only could help me. My poor wife—and poor Edith! The blow will be terrible to them, if I stand in the dock at the Old Bailey."

"But you won't; you'll pay."

"I've promised to pay, but the worst of it is, I can't. Lately I've been very hard hit, and I've only about five thousand at the bank. That's useless."

"Then how do you propose to act?" I inquired in a low voice.

"Heaven alone knows! Face the music, I suppose."

"Bosh!" I laughed. "You're surely not going to act the fool?"

"I don't quite follow you, d'Escombe," he said. "Can you see any way out of it?"

"Well," I replied with some hesitation. "There is—one way."

"How?" he cried eagerly, rising and facing me earnestly. I was silent for a few moments, carefully examining my well-manicured fingernails.

"This man Davies is not a very reliable person, is he? From what I gathered, he possesses certain proofs of your dishonesty, and he alone knows how much you've had—and how you have had it. Am I correct?"

"Yes. He knows everything. He's learnt it in a most artful way."

"Probably in order to bleed you. He believes you to be well off."

"In all probability."

"Well," I said; "you have only to reckon with him. You are certain of that?"

"Yes, at present nobody else knows. And he will tell nobody, otherwise he couldn't black-mail me afterwards."

"Good. Then he is your sole enemy," I

said. "And—well, I put it to you, for example, supposing that his mouth were closed there would be no fear. Nobody would know into whose pockets the money had gone!"

He nodded, his countenance full of despair.

"It might be believed to have gone into his," he said.

Apparently he did not grasp my true meaning. He, of course, believed me to be the very soul of honour, and the perfect pink of respectability.

"We may suppose many things, d'Escombe," he said, a hard expression showing in the corners of his mouth. "But we can hardly suppose that his lips will be closed," and he sighed, his eyes downcast to the carpet. "No, for three weeks I'll live and enjoy life—and then, well, probably I shall find an easy way out," he added meaningly.

"You can," I said very seriously. "It only wants a little courage."

"Suicide, eh?" he murmured.

"Not at all," I said, and then after a pause, my eyes fixed upon his, I added: "There is a way by which his mouth may be closed."

He looked very keenly at me for a few seconds. His grey brows knit slowly, as

though the drift of my argument was slowly filtering through his brain.

"Phew!" he gasped. "I see! You are a doctor d'Escombe. You could help me—if you only dared!"

I nodded in the affirmative.

"A risky business! You'd want a big price, and—well, I can't pay very much, though to me it means life or death!"

"A thousand," I said. "I'll manage it for that, and free you."

"And take all risks?" he whispered.

"On two conditions. That you pay me a couple of hundred now—as a retainer, as it were—and that you are for ever silent."

I saw in an instant that he swallowed the bait. He was just a little frightened at the suggestion, but ten minutes later, in the broad, open light of day with the sunshine streaming into that little room, he purchased the life of his enemy. He wrote me a cheque for two hundred pounds.

Then, fearing that one day or other he might condemn me, I compelled him to scribble a few lines to the effect that the sum was paid to me "for private services rendered."

That, my dear fellow, together with the existence of the cheque, would be evidence

too strong to permit of any double-dealing on his part.

I placed the cheque in my pocket, highly satisfied with my morning's work. I was to release a patient, and a good fellow, from an ugly situation, and rid society of a person who was extremely undesirable—a man who had blackmailed many of his City friends on previous occasions.

Strange, my dear friend, how money tumbles unexpectedly into my hands just at the very moment that I require it! But there, I suppose if one is unscrupulous, and not cursed by too delicate a conscience, one can always earn a decent income in my profession.

Outside Swiss Cottage station I took a taxi across to Kensington, and on arriving home had a quiet cigar. Over it I tried to formulate a plan. That same afternoon I put an inquiry through to the Information Bureau which I sometimes patronized, and three days later learned that Llewellyn Henson Davies was a well-known City man who had dabbled in finance for years, and who lived in chambers in King Street, St. James'. He was a bachelor, very quiet, staid, and highly respectable—a member of Brooks's, and on Sundays he attended St. James', Piccadilly, regularly.

His *ménage* was not an extensive one, consisting only of an elderly Italian valet.

When I called at Fitzjohn's Avenue and told Farnell what I knew, he was amazed.

"My dear d'Escombe, how did you learn all this?" he asked.

But I only assumed a sphinx-like expression, and smiled, asking him to supply any further details he could regarding his enemy's habits or his haunts.

"I really don't know. Sometimes he lunches at Birch's, in Cornhill," he said; "and he's a member of the City Carlton. You know his office in the Poultry, at the corner of Bucklersbury?"

"Yes," I said. "I suppose I must now make his acquaintance."

But scarcely had I uttered this sentence when his daughter Edith entered the room.

"Whose acquaintance, Dad?" she asked.

"We are talking business, dearie," he replied. "And I wish that when I'm engaged with Dr. d'Escombe you would knock before you come in. It is hardly lady-like to burst into a man's room like this!"

"But, Dad, how was I to know?" she protested with a pout. "I didn't hear you talking at first. I thought you were alone,"

and she glanced at me with an expression of annoyance.

"You must not think, my dear; you must always make certain," he said.

Then after another covert, and not altogether pleasant glance at me, she turned reluctantly and left.

"I hope your daughter does not suspect anything?" I asked, glancing at the closed door.

"What can she suspect?" queried my patient. "No, my dear fellow, don't have any such misgivings. You are quite safe. I leave the whole matter entirely to you. He must be silenced, and you alone can do it. But what means do you intend to employ?"

"Ah! You must leave all details to me, Mr. Farnell," I said firmly. "In such a difficult and serious case one must provide for every contingency, however remote. Davies means mischief, hence he is just as wary as ourselves."

"Well, act entirely as you think fit, and there are eight hundred pounds for you on the day that he—the day that he is incompetent to trouble me further," he said.

And with that, I left and returned to Cromwell Road.

That afternoon I called on a man whom I sometimes employed to make private inquiries for me, and I instructed him to find out something further regarding Davies. Two days later I had a report in my hands which showed that the person in question was well-known in a certain circle in the City, but he had the reputation of being addicted to sharp practice. He was a director of two distinctly shady concerns. The whole report, indeed, went to show that, while posing as an influential man, he was, on the contrary, little better than an adventurer. He had led an eventful life in South Africa before the war, and had made several remarkable coups in finance in consequence.

For a long while I pondered over what I read.

Then, passing into that bare upstairs room which I used as a laboratory, and to which nobody was ever admitted, I went to the window and examined my tiny tubes of various cultures in the small, square incubator. They were innocent-looking little tubes, in all conscience, but contained in them were sufficient germs of deadly diseases to decimate a town.

The particular tube to which I turned my

attention was one in which I was making a rather difficult cultivation of certain bacteria which, on the day before, I had received from Paris. I placed a little of it beneath my microscope and on magnifying it a thousand times watched those minute micro-organisms, the exact nature of which science has not, up to the present, determined.

Still, the culture had commenced, and I raised my eye from the microscope, perfectly satisfied. The organism resembled a kind of yeast which bacteriologists have placed among the blastomycetes, yet more than that we know but little. Nevertheless, the tiniest particle of that virus introduced beneath the skin, either by injection or by abrasion, would certainly result in one of the most horrible and fatal diseases to which man is subject.

The media I was using contained brain substance, and, delighted with the entire success of my experiment, I left the room, carefully re-locking the door behind me.

That evening, anyone passing down King Street, St. James', about eight o'clock would, perhaps, have noticed a taxi draw up at the kerb at the corner of Bury Street. In it someone sat back in the darkness, and the driver smoked a cigarette while seated at the wheel.

The man inside the cab was myself, and I was watching for the man Davies to emerge from his chambers, which were over a hat shop.

I was in evening-dress, and I suppose I presented as respectable an appearance as he did, when, after three-quarters of an hour, he came forth in black overcoat and crush-hat, and strolled up Duke Street into Jermyn Street, entering the Maison Jules for dinner.

Hence, I was compelled to follow up in the taxi, and again wait without my own dinner, till an hour later he emerged and took a taxi to the Palace Theatre.

There he seated himself in a stall, while I watched him from the promenade. Then, during the *entr'acte*, he came forth and descended to the bar. I allowed him to order a whisky-and-soda, when, suddenly seizing my opportunity, I came up beside him, and reaching over to give the barmaid my money, accidentally upset his drink.

"Do forgive me, my dear sir," I said in my best professional manner of apology. "It was horribly clumsy of me!" And I at once ordered another whisky-and-soda.

I noted his annoyance, but the profuseness of my apology melted him, and when I

expressed hope that none of it had gone upon his clothes, he said with a laugh :

“Oh, no! It’s really nothing—a mere accident.”

So we drank together, chatted for a few moments, discussed the programme, and agreed that it was not up to the usual standard of the house.

Ten minutes later he had accepted one of my cigarettes, and had paid for a drink for me.

Knowing that Farnell had never mentioned me, I told him my real name. Indeed, I gave him my card, which showed that I was a medical man, while he gave me one of his.

Presently I went back with my new acquaintance to witness the latest dance. But we voted it poor, and before we parted we went again to the bar.

I was much gratified to find that he seemed to have taken quite a fancy to me. Why, I cannot tell. Perhaps it was because I had been telling him some funny hospital stories, which he declared were quite fresh to him, and certainly they caused him to laugh heartily.

“I wonder that you smoke cigarettes without a mouthpiece!” I suddenly exclaimed. “We doctors never do. It is not healthy to allow your lungs to do the same work as a plug of

cotton-wool can do. See mine," and I exhibited my amber mouthpiece, which, unscrewing in the centre, contained a plug of wool.

"By Jove! An excellent idea. Where do you get them?" he inquired.

"I'll send you one," I said, laughing, "as souvenir of this meeting. And we shall meet again, I hope."

"Certainly. I'll be most pleased. But, I say," he added, "it's awfully good of you."

"Not at all," I declared, and, then the show being over, we strolled together down Shaftesbury Avenue as far as Piccadilly Circus, where we parted.

Next day I sent him the cigarette-tube by post, and three days afterwards called at his chambers, having previously rung him up on the telephone.

The instant I entered his cosy sitting-room in the twilight of the wintry afternoon, I saw that at least I had successfully accomplished one point.

But I remained silent, took the cigarette he offered me, and sank into the big arm-chair beside the fire.

For some time we chatted merrily, the room

lit by the leaping flames of the fire, and I proposed dinner the next evening and a theatre afterwards, to which he raised no objection.

I could read in his face the word "adventurer." And further, I had no great liking for the thin, sallow-faced foreign valet who attended him.

Presently I remarked casually :

"I suppose you got the cigarette-tube all right?"

"Oh, yes, d'Escombe. So many thanks for it," he replied. "How very foolish of me. I quite forgot to thank you for it. I've smoked it every day since. See, I have it now," and he removed it from his lips. "I find it most pleasant smoking, so cool and different altogether from the usual mode."

"Yes, I see. But——" I exclaimed, scrutinizing his lips. "You were only just in time, Mr. Davies."

"Why, what do you mean?" he asked in surprise.

"Oh, nothing very much," I replied, in an endeavour to treat the matter with unconcern. "Only—well, I see you have a significant sore upon your lower lip."

"It came yesterday," he said. "I've never had one before. You're a doctor, d'Escombe ;

surely it's nothing serious? I'll switch on the light."

He did so, and as he stood beneath it I carefully examined his mouth and the small open sore which, truth to tell, had been purposely set up by sucking the prepared holder I had sent him.

He saw that I did not like the look of it.

"What is it?" he demanded. "It's uncommonly sore."

"Well, there's of course nothing to be really alarmed at—not blood-poisoning or anything of that sort. Still, it should be attended to. If it spreads, it may disfigure your whole chin. I've known such cases. So, if you'll allow me, I'll send you over a little ointment. Rub it well in with the fore-finger both night and morning."

"Thanks, d'Escombe; that will be awfully good of you," the man declared.

"Not at all," I laughed. "I always believe in taking things of that sort in time. When once such a thing spreads one never knows how it will end."

"You alarm me!"

"Oh, my dear fellow, don't be alarmed. Simply use the remedy regularly, and in a day or two it will entirely disappear."

We smoked on for an hour, and when I rose to leave I promised I would send him over the ointment that same evening by district messenger.

This I did, and as you may surmise, dear boy, when I mixed the ointment I emptied into it the whole of the little tubeful of that culture which I had so carefully incubated.

Next night we dined together in the grill-room at the Carlton, and as I sat opposite him I inquired after the little sore upon his lip.

"Oh, it's very much better," he declared. "I used what you sent me last night, and again this morning. It is rapidly healing."

I expressed pleasure, but somehow that tiny sore fascinated me, as, ever and anon, I looked into the face of the doomed man. We went to the Gaiety together and sat in the stalls, watching a musical comedy. But, by Jove! I was hardly at my ease.

The trick had been done. I had only now to await results.

Next evening I visited old Mr. Farnell, and almost his first question when we were alone was :

"Well, what has happened ?"

"Nothing," I said. "Nothing at least to

cause you a moment's worry. Only, on next Thursday week, I shall call here for my cheque."

He stared at me with a mixed expression of amazement and pleasure.

"Then you have been successful!" he gasped. "How?"

"The matter concerns myself," I replied with a smile. "To-day is Friday; on Thursday week, or at latest on Friday, I shall ask you for the cheque—that's all."

"And it will be ready for you, d'Escombe, with a hundred added to it," was the old fellow's reply. "By Jove! when I pay you I really believe my rheumatism will be cured. I shall enter upon a new lease of life."

"Of course you will," I said cheerfully. "Didn't I tell you there was no reason whatever to worry?"

"Ah, yes. But I didn't know that you were so plucky," was his reply. "Most doctors wear a mask of respectability, and would be horrified at any suggestion of the kind. Yet you made it yourself."

"As a matter of business, purely," I declared. "By releasing you from a difficulty I shall also be benefiting myself."

"I like you, d'Escombe," he said, his big

face broadening into a laugh. "You're such a philosopher."

"People who knew the truth would perhaps call me something else," I remarked with a grin.

"But tell me, what have you done?" he said. "Davies called upon me in the City this morning and expressed a hope that I should not fail to put matters right by the day named. He seemed quite in his usual health."

"He is," I replied. "Probably he never felt better in all his life. But why is he so anxious that you should pay back the money?" I queried. "It surely doesn't affect him. He wants to profit by your defalcations, but I can't exactly see how he would, if you raised the money and repaid it."

"Well, he is jointly responsible with myself," Farnell replied.

"But if he could show that he had no knowledge that you had withdrawn the money, there surely could be no charge against him," I exclaimed. "No, Mr. Farnell, the fellow's game was purely one of blackmail. He intended that you should give him five hundred, or perhaps a thousand, to allow matters to drift along for a few weeks longer. Then another demand—and so on."

"You think so?" asked my patient.

"I'm sure of it. But if my diagnosis be correct, he will not have an opportunity. I shall not call here again till the day I have named—and then it will be to receive my fee of eight hundred pounds," I added with a laugh.

"And it will afford me the greatest pleasure to hand it to you, Dr. d'Escombe," he answered. "Only my curiosity is aroused. Do tell me what means you are employing to bring matters to a successful issue."

"No, Mr. Farnell," I responded. "You must forgive me if I refuse to expose to you the cause. Your only interest is in the effect. Remember, you left it entirely to my discretion."

"Ah, I see!" he said. "By Jove! d'Escombe, you're a wary bird. You'd make a fortune in the City. I quite discern your point. If I knew your method, I might talk, eh?"

I smiled again in the affirmative. Afterwards we played a game of billiards, and I left just before eleven o'clock.

On the following Saturday evening I met Davies by appointment at the "Berkeley," and we dined together, and afterwards went to

the Alhambra. He complained of bad pains in his head.

"My nerves seem all unstrung," he said. "I don't know what's been the matter with me for the past couple of days. I'm entirely out of sorts."

"Ah! I expect you want a change. Too much City. Why don't you go to Brighton, or somewhere, for a few days?"

"Because, just now, d'Escombe, I'm very busy," he declared. "I have to attend to several important and private matters—business that nobody can conduct for me."

"But I don't like your symptoms," I said. "One should never neglect a nervous attack."

"You'll have to prescribe for me, d'Escombe," he said with a laugh, as we leaned over the back of the grand circle of the theatre. "That sore on my lip has completely healed."

"I told you it would, if you persevered with the ointment," was my reply.

"Well, you'll now have to cure my nerves," he declared.

"I'll call to-morrow, if you really wish it," I said. "But, I somehow hate treating personal friends. I wish you'd call in a local man. There's Spencer, in Jermyn Street—a

most excellent man, who has, I believe, a very large practice about here. Why not consult him? I'll also look in, but only as a consultant."

"Why don't you like to treat me?" he asked quickly.

"Because I always think it best for my friends to be treated by other practitioners. I've found it so all through my career," I said, perhaps lamely.

"I had Spencer once—about a year ago."

"Then have him again. There's nothing to be alarmed at, as far as I can see. Only, if I were you, I would let him see you. There can be no harm in it."

"None. You are quite right, d'Escombe. I shall call on him to-morrow."

It was long past midnight when we parted. I was quite willing for Spencer to see the man, for I knew that, on discovering the true nature of the disease, he would never suspect its real cause, and moreover, whatever efforts he might make with the serum treatment, all would be without avail. The period of incubation had been too long. No power on earth could now save him.

Well, my dear fellow, my surmise proved correct.

When I called two days later I found Spencer with him. The patient was in bed suffering from spasms, especially of the muscles of deglutition and respiration, with excitement evidenced by delirium.

"This is a curious case," the smart, elderly practitioner declared, as we both stood beside the unconscious man. "At present, I've not been able to diagnose it properly."

I pretended to make an effort to diagnose it, but without avail.

Next day I called before Spencer arrived, and found Davies conscious again.

"By Jove, d'Escombe," he exclaimed, "I'm having a bad time. But you'll pull me through, won't you, old chap?" he implored me.

"Of course we'll get you right again," I assured him. Then, with a few comforting words, I left.

Really, I felt rather sorry for him, because I knew of the agony that must ensue.

On Wednesday, when I called at eleven, Spencer was again with him, but he was again unconscious.

"Rabies," declared the doctor. "Yesterday, he told me that he had been bitten by a farmer's dog while out shooting, nine months

ago. I at once obtained some Pasteur serum, but, as you see, the case is rapid and hopeless."

On Thursday morning, when I asked Spencer over the telephone of his patient, I was scarcely surprised to learn that he had expired in terrible agony soon after two o'clock that morning.

So, at noon, I kept my appointment with old Farnell, and received the eight-hundred-pound fee for my little account—with the extra hundred added.

And that same evening, after a visit to the dead man's chambers to take a last look at him, Mr. Farnell carried away with him certain proofs of his own defalcations which, if not destroyed, might have been attended with rather unpleasant results.

CHAPTER XVI

IN WHICH A RED-HAIRED LADY SHEDS TEARS

I HAVE often mentioned to you, I feel sure, among my many rambling letters, that I have always posed as a ladies' man; but that word pose does not include all my dealings with the so-called "fair" sex. I have had my periods of temporary infatuation, even madness, and apropos of the following incident, I repeat my old axiom: "Fight shy of red-haired men, but follow red-haired women."

I had one curious, and somewhat instructive little episode proving my phrase, I think, in which I ran some risk, and from which I only gained the gratitude and temporary affection of a very red-haired woman, and in addition I lost a sovereign—the cost of a wreath for her husband—and an hour of my valuable time expended in attending his funeral.

The Manne-Martyns came to live, as you no doubt will remember, in Phillimore Gardens

about four years after I started practice in Cromwell Road, but if I recollect rightly, my dear Brown, you had but little to do with them. The man was certainly very objectionable, although he was without a doubt a gentleman, as far as blood and education were concerned.

I can still easily call to mind the first time that I met Rita Manne-Martyn, although I knew her by sight before.

It was on a cold wet night, and I was comfortably settled in a big chair with a pipe of Perique, and Haeckel's "Riddle of the Universe," when the sound of the night-bell made me groan. "Always the way," I growled, "one is certain to have a night visit if the weather is extra bad."

As everybody else was in bed I went to the door, which, as I opened it, admitted a bitter blast of north wind accompanied by drifting sleet, and also a female figure in a white cloak—an opera-cloak—ye gods! for a night like that.

"Are you Dr. d'Escombe," gasped a particularly sweet voice. "Please let me come in, and do shut the door."

"Yes, I am Dr. d'Escombe," I answered, as I carried out her order. "Please come

inside. Surely you are very unwise to come out dressed in this way on such a night," and I led the way to my smoking-room with its warm, cosy fire.

I glanced at her as I handed her a chair, and was astonished to see how wonderfully handsome she was, because although I had seen her before on a few occasions, I had not noticed that fact.

"Mrs. Manne-Martyn, I believe?" I ventured to say, and as she sat down I saw that she had on a black, very *décolleté*, evening dress and thin satin drawing-room slippers, which were soaked through and most certainly ruined.

"What can I do for you? I fear there must be something serious the matter to bring you out to me like this," I said as I took her opera-cloak and hung it over the back of a chair. I wondered in my own mind most consumedly why this pretty woman had come to see me in this strange and unorthodox kind of way.

"I—I hardly know how to tell you, Dr. d'Escombe," she replied, her shortness of breath caused, I imagined, partly by the storm blowing outside which she had braved, and partly by agitation. "My husband, he is ill—perhaps dying—I don't know. Oh! you will

help me, won't you? because—his people know that we quarrel—and they might say——”

Her really beautiful dark blue eyes, full of tears, looked at me most appealingly, as though she thought I could understand everything.

“Say what?”

“Well, I must tell you—nobody else knows—but he smokes ‘hasheesh’—Indian hemp, you know—and I’m afraid he’s had too much. He’s quite different to what he usually is. Will you come now?”

I must say I didn’t like the look of things at all. There was evidently something “not quite straight;” not that I cared, from the ordinary point of view. I was only thinking of myself, although I could not restrain a certain regard for this charming red-haired visitor.

“I will order a taxi,” I suggested.

“No, no; it’s only a quarter of a mile—see, I’ve walked it once,” interrupted my visitor. “Won’t you come back with me now? I can’t wait,” she urged.

Certainly if she—a young and delicate-looking woman—could do it, so could I. I considered for a moment.

“Very well, Mrs. Martyn, I will brave the storm; if you can, I can,” I said.

She looked at her drenched evening shoes and muddy stockings and gave a little short+ hard laugh.

"One would think I love my husband very dearly, wouldn't they?" she exclaimed.

"Excuse me one moment," I said, as I went to put on my bad-weather garments, thinking and wondering all the time. She was *very* pretty; and she was afraid—of what?

We started off through the driving snow together towards Kensington Road. I offered my arm, which was accepted, but so fierce was the wind that conversation was practically impossible. Consequently when I arrived at the house I knew scarcely anything of my case.

"You must get those wet clothes off at once," I said to my companion. "Shall I wait for you?"

"No—yes—yes. I won't be long. Won't you sit down? and I will be with you in a few moments."

My new patient lived in a very decent house, as you will remember. No doubt they had money, for the room in which I waited was beautifully furnished, and showed the touch of a woman's hand in the various flower-vases and nick-nacks which adorned it.

"Indian hemp," I muttered as I waited.

"I wonder how long he has taken it, and if his mind is affected yet?"

The lady returned very soon, and seeing her in the bright light, with her hat off, I noticed that her eyes were swollen and red. She had been crying.

"Will you come up, doctor? I'll show you the way," she said. So I followed her promptly.

Lying on a couch at the foot of a single bed, in a comparatively small room, was a man in a dressing-gown, his face purple and bloated, his breathing slow, heavy and stertorous. This, combined with thin feeble pulse, the condition of the pupils, and the insensitive eye-balls, told me that his wife was correct—he was suffering from poison. Was it what I had been told?

Ideas pass through one's mind swiftly under such circumstances—particularly so, perhaps, in mine—and I kept on wondering. She had told me they quarrelled. The man, as I had seen him before in the street, and as I saw him now, comatose and half dead, gave me the impression of being a brute. Dissipation was written large in his fat face, and I could well understand him being cruel, and repulsive also, to such a woman as this—his wife. Had

she attempted to kill him, and was she playing a part?

I decided to be very careful both in word and action, noticing as I did that the demeanour of the servant, elderly and sour of visage, was not that of a friendly domestic. She appeared to be somewhat of an inimical character, and was in close attendance on the sick man.

"You say that he is in the habit of smoking 'hasheesh'?" I inquired of the lady, in a tone of voice which the servant could not help but hear.

"Yes, doctor," was the answer; "and to-night we have been playing bridge and he lost every rubber. This seemed to irritate him, and he retired as soon as our friends left us to have his usual smoke, and after—I found him like this!"

There was but little for me to do, but of course I had my hypodermic case with me, and I gave him some strychnine to pull his heart together, and then, having given a few other minor instructions to the grim-faced woman, I told Mrs. Manne-Martyn that we could now only wait and watch the result.

"Has he ever been like this before?" I queried.

"Not so bad. I was never really frightened before to-night, but, I suppose I ought to tell you, he has been drinking very heavily for the last two days—in fact, more or less for the past two years." Her voice shook as the sentence was completed, and I could look back and see a world of misery, a life of horror, which this refined, sensitive, pretty woman had already passed through.

Don't be irritated with me, Brown, if I do sometimes wax sentimental. You know there is a strain of that trick in me, although you, on reading these lines, would hardly think so.

I felt a great compassion, even pity, for the unfortunate lady. I suppose my expression, or perhaps my voice, told her this; at any rate some subtle form of telepathy occurred between us, because, as I said: "I am afraid you've had a very bad time of it," she interrupted me by laying her head on her bare arms—she was in some *négligé* which showed the porcelain whiteness and perfect contour of these very distinctly—and breaking into a passion of deep, silent sobs.

It hurt me to see this. I always hate to see a woman really cry; I don't mean the trickle of tears and the red nose which can be produced almost at will, such as you see in the

pit of the theatre, but the heart-breaking tears of absolute despair. There I go again! Forgive me, old boy, but I will not offend any more.

I managed, ultimately, to quiet her, and then asked for her story.

It was a sad one, and the man lying upstairs was evidently, as I thought from the look of him, an absolute brute and blackguard. She had plenty of marks to show of his violence at different times. She showed me a hardly-healed cut on her head, luckily hidden by her abundant bronze-red hair.

"This is his last effort," she said with a sickly smile. "He threw a teacup at me, and, as it broke, it cut me, and he laughed when he saw the blood trickle down my face and neck. Oh! how I hate him," she continued, "and yet——"

"Why do you go on like this?" I asked. "There are ways——"

"Yes, but we have one little boy, and I will not, while I *can* endure, let his name be associated with anything disgraceful. That is why I have borne it these last two years. Not only him," she nodded towards the staircase, "but that woman, who is an old servant of his family, and his mother and sister. They all

hate me and make my life more wretched, and will believe nothing against him. I must wire to them as soon as I can."

"What a pity if he should recover," I thought to myself. When, however, I saw him again before going home I felt I was going to be disappointed. His heart was stronger, and a very slight reflex had returned to the eyes. He was going to recover, and I told his wife so.

"You will come in and see him again, won't you, Dr. d'Escombe?" she implored. "You've no idea what a relief it is to have somebody to confide in."

I went again, and yet again, and came to know the man and his relations. But I got to know Mrs. Manne-Martyn better, and it was not long before I decided that her drunken, drug-smoking husband should not cumber the earth very much longer.

If I did carry out my decision, I could not hide from myself the fact that I had a very difficult and even dangerous proposition before me.

There are some folks who, however objectionable, however vile they may appear to be in the eyes of the unbiased observer, have someone whose outlook is blind as to their faults; someone who makes every excuse for

their shortcomings and will, at every turn, allocate the blame to every source except the right one.

In this case I had two such individuals to deal with—Mrs. Manne-Martyn senior, and her daughter, the younger sister of my patient.

He did not recover rapidly from his overdose of Indian hemp and alcohol, and at the end of a fortnight I was still in daily attendance.

I do not wish to say much about it, Brown, but in that comparatively short time Mrs. Manne-Martyn and I found ourselves upon distinctly intimate terms. I imagined myself seriously in love with her, and she—well, dear little soul, she had been living a terrible life for at least two years, and a little real sympathy and help appealed to her more, perhaps, than anything else could have done.

So my resolve to dispose of Julius Manne-Martyn, Esquire, became more and more decisive, but I fully appreciated the fact that I had to get through a very vigilant and suspicious defence, in the shape of the mother, sister, and the afore-mentioned domestic.

On several occasions the sick man had become delirious. He had certainly suffered from a mild attack of delirium tremens,

masked and mitigated by his drug-taking. While in this condition he never ceased to rave against his wife, although I am quite certain that he had not, even in his sanest moments, any reason up to the present so to do.

"Traitor! traitor!" he would yell out. "I know you hate me! Kill me now! Do for me! I know; I have seen the loathing in your eyes," and so on. His pitying relations would stand by and nod their heads, look at each other and say among themselves: "We always knew it, didn't we? Why did he marry her?" and so on, *ad nauseam*.

They would not allow her into the sick-room. Not that she cared, for who could have cared for a man like that? But the ignominy, the disgrace in front of the servants, hurt her, and I felt that this could not go on.

The greatest care was necessary. He must certainly die of something which was likely and reasonable—some ailment absolutely above suspicion, something which must, if necessary, stand the searching of an expert post-mortem examination, because it would be fatal to trust in any way whatsoever the ultimate movements or suspicions of the very prejudiced and narrow-minded women with whom I now had to deal and contend.

I paved the way for the idea which I had in my mind by putting some bronchial irritant into the mixture, combining it with small doses of belladonna. I will tell you later why I did so. Then, one day, the thought flashed across me—why it had not occurred to me before I cannot say, except perhaps that I was badly infatuated—how would Rita be situated when he died?

It was a serious consideration. We had had many a quiet talk together, but I fear business matters had been allowed to slide, and I knew nothing of her affairs. And myself—well, I've always been hard-up, and at that particular time things were perhaps even a trifle worse than usual. I was practically living on credit. I could do nothing for her; you see, I had been hard hit in the rubber boom—and, goodness knows, I kept my own expenses low enough.

"Rita, darling," I said one evening, as she sat with me in her cosy boudoir, "how would you be situated if *he* were to die?"

Her slim fingers tightened upon my arm. "He—die!" she laughed, a quiet hopeless laugh. "Don't dream of it, dear. He will live to make my life a curse."

"Yes," I interrupted; "but if he did?"

"If he did?" she repeated. "The heavens would fall. Why, I should be free, and I should have the three hundred a year he settled on me at first."

"You're sure?" I felt that this had sealed his fate. "You are quite sure?"

"Yes, yes; he has often cursed himself for a fool for doing it."

Every man has his moment of madness. I have seldom given myself away, I think. Luckily I had no cause to regret it; but I did do so now.

"Then he dies," I said, my arm around her, the words whispered into her ear. It sounds melodramatic, but it was not. It was dead serious determination. "And," I continued, looking into her face, "you must help me."

"I—help you—how—what do you mean, Archie?" was the whispered answer.

"I can manage it easily, but I must have a chance to get him by myself. Those women must be got out of the way. Three—two—minutes will do it, but it must be certain."

"Julius—die," she muttered, clinging close up to me in the semi-darkness. "Do you mean it?"

"Yes, yes, dear, I am speaking in earnest," I answered. "I cannot see you go on like

this—with that man and those awful women. I *must* help you.”

“And the risk?”

“I’ll chance the risk,” I answered, kissing her, as I thought to myself that it was not the first I had run by many.

“You must go now, Archie,” said my companion. “They’ll miss me; I am always spied upon, but—yes, I’ll help you. Oh, how can I thank you?—but you must not do it. Why take this awful risk?”

“None at all, Rita,” I replied as we kissed good-night. “None—if you can keep the secret.”

“I would die sooner than say one word which would implicate you; I swear it. Oh, only——”

I stopped her; she was inclined to get hysterical. She was one of those highly-strung, nervous women with an infinity of pluck under trying circumstances, but who, curiously enough, break down very easily when their affections or sympathies are aroused. I knew she had grown very fond of me, so I felt compelled to put on the brake, as it were.

“Pull yourself together, dear,” I spoke quietly, and very quickly soothed her excited nerves.

God ! Laurence, I'm fond of her still—if only things had turned out right ! But there, they did not.

“Come and see me at my consulting hour to-morrow,” I said as I kissed her again, and strolled down Phillimore Gardens home, to think matters over.

I had started Manne-Martyn with an artificial cough, and I had given him dilated pupils, which his attendants had noticed. So far I was on the road.

But the opportunity had to be made, and Rita, much as I disliked the idea, must help me, must draw off the enemy, while I, the preliminaries having been arranged, brought off the final *coup*.

“What do you think of my son, doctor,” asked my patient's mother on the morning following my revelation to Rita. “Is he really improving ? He is sure to get well again—is he not ? ”

“As far as I can see, madam.”

“I believe it is all Rita's fault,” she said ; “she has treated him shamefully, poor fellow ! He has been driven to do wrong——”

“That is really nothing to do with me, Mrs. Manne-Martyn,” I declared, for I feared that if she went on in that strain I might arouse

suspicion in her mind. If I showed the slightest regard for Rita my prestige as family doctor was gone.

"When do you think you will allow him out of bed?" asked his sister—a seriously-dressed lady in tailor-made coat and skirt, and with a hard, most unpleasant expression on her face.

"He's slow in picking up," I answered, "but the nursing is just now everything. I must congratulate you on your knowledge of such work. The way you manage him is really wonderful."

He was still quite unable to do anything by himself alone, and required constant help.

"I ought to warn you," I continued, "against the possible risk of a relapse. Such things are not uncommon in cases like this."

"Oh, doctor, I do hope not," chimed in the mother. "He is getting every attention, and we are doing all we can. Your instructions are being carried out to the very letter."

This was what I was anxious to know, as the idea in my mind made time, punctuality, that is to say, the essential factor.

I had another long talk with Rita on the subject of her husband's decease, and ultimately the innate devil in her broke through the

veneer of morality, and we laid our plans carefully, and without reserve on either side.

"And after?" said she.

After—I hardly knew. I was desperately in love with her for the time; I'll defy any man with an eye to the artistic, and a mind, a soul, an inner consciousness of sex, call it what you like, untrammelled by artificial laws and customs, to be anything else. I am positive there are some women whom no man can resist—that is, if the woman is in real dead earnest. Rita was one of those.

"You must manage to put a small narcotic dose into his food or drink to-morrow morning at breakfast time. You can manage that—can't you, Rita?" I inquired. "I will give you a little phial when I see you to-night. It will be a very tiny dose."

I intended to give the doomed man—for doomed he was as soon as my plans were laid—enough of a concentrated preparation of belladonna to send him off into a sound sleep for some hours.

That being accomplished, I proposed to make my daily call in the afternoon, because the "dragon" and her daughter invariably drove for an hour or two after lunch, visiting and shopping. So I had then only one enemy to deal with.

Now I had decided some time since to use, if I used anything at all for a deadly purpose, bacteria called the *diplococcus lanceolatus*, which I have mentioned to you once before—a germ which in the lung causes pneumonia, but which, curiously enough, if it takes its habitat in some other portion of the body, sets up a totally different set of symptoms, such as inflammation of the brain, or of a joint, the main point being that the result is almost invariably fatal, and quite beyond the possibility of discovery by ordinary methods.

If I had three minutes with Mr. Manne-Martyn on the following afternoon I could, assisted by my faithful hypodermic, put into his circulation a sufficient amount of this germ-infection to, with the smallest pinch of luck, assist him rapidly to leave a world which he certainly did not adorn.

It was impossible to say where he would be attacked. Time alone would show. But I had to depend upon Rita to create a diversion, to remove for a sufficiently long time the sour-visaged Martha. This was the weak point of the plan of campaign.

Would my fellow-conspirator be successful?

“What will you do?” I had inquired of her.

“Leave it to me; I will manage it,” was

the answer I got. And no more information was given. "Only be ready when Martha leaves you alone with him," she added.

I gave the poor little ill-used woman the narcotic dose that night, and as I left her she said, almost gaily: "Au revoir, till to-morrow at half-past three. You may rely upon me."

True to time, with the germ-culture in the barrel of my syringe, I arrived at the house and, of course, found Martha at the bedside of my patient.

"He's just gone off into a heavy sleep, doctor," she informed me, after I had told her that an important case had kept me during the morning, "and Mrs. Manne-Martyn hardly liked leaving him, but I promised her that I would not leave the room, or let her," she nodded towards the staircase, "come in."

I proceeded in a methodical manner to examine my patient. He was breathing heavily, snoring in fact. But I had hardly finished taking his pulse-rate—much I cared about it!—when a terrified shriek rang through the house—a most thrilling and ear-piercing scream.

It was Rita's voice. What had happened?

I started for the door, and then, "Martha, Martha, come quickly," the voice of the housemaid came from below.

The old servant listened for a second or two, and then another scream resounded through the house, and turning to me, she said hurriedly:

"Will you excuse me for one moment, doctor? Somebody is hurt, I'm afraid. It sounds like young Mrs. Martyn."

"All right, run along quickly and see," I answered, but I felt upset, and hardly knew what to do. Had Rita really hurt herself? Surely those cries of pain were not simulated.

However, for the moment I hardened my heart, screwed the needle on to the syringe and, pushing the point deep into the back of the sleeper's neck, pressed the piston down to the bottom of the barrel.

The apparently unconscious man aroused with a yell. The pain of the needle had awakened him. He turned so rapidly as to break off the point of the needle and leave it deeply imbedded in the tissues!

Then, as I hurriedly pocketed the remainder of the broken instrument, he sat up in bed, howling out: "Help, help! murder——"

My wits almost left me for a moment.

What was wrong downstairs I knew not, but I felt very anxious with this new complication.

It takes time to write this, Brown, but the whole business, from start to finish, had occurred in a few seconds, and, to make matters worse, who should appear in the doorway but the sick man's mother and sister.

"Why, whatever is the matter?" inquired the elder lady breathlessly. "Has this house gone mad?"

Rushing up to the man, who was still calling out and howling, she put her hand on his head.

"What have you done, Dr. d'Escombe?" she asked severely. "Poor boy—my poor dear boy!" addressing the fat-faced son, who kept on murmuring "Help! murder!"

The old lady looked suspiciously at me. "Something has brought him to this state, and Martha is not here, doctor. What does this mean?"

"Don't be alarmed, madam," I said as quietly as I could. The position was very awkward, especially with that broken needle to be reckoned with. And then, Rita! I must go and find out what was wrong with her.

"There has been some accident downstairs,

I fear," I continued. "What is it? Can I help?"

"No, no, doctor; don't leave Julius. It is only that silly girl. She has scalded her hand; Martha is there, but how dare she leave this room? What a lucky thing we were anxious, and returned early."

"Is Ri—is Mrs. Martyn injured?"—my voice shook a little I am sure. "I hope it's not serious?"

"No, not at all," answered the unsympathetic old lady. "Please attend to my son."

He was still rolling about in bed, but getting a little more rational.

"Poor old Julius," said his hard-faced sister; "it's all right; nobody will hurt you." But all the time I was on tenter-hooks. Would that broken needle be discovered?

"I think Mrs. Manne-Martyn's cries upset him," I explained. "There is nothing wrong with him; in fact, he is much better."

"It was very wrong of Martha to leave him," persisted the elder woman. Her callousness as to the sufferer downstairs made me so cross that I threw caution to the winds, and said: "I think I ought to go and see if I can do anything for Mrs. Martyn." And I strode out of the room.

Poor, brave little woman; she had purposely poured some boiling water over her left hand so that no suspicion could arise as to the cause of her diversion of Martha's watchfulness. I found her crying with pain. However, I dissembled my fears of discovery, and gave her a reassuring nod. After her plucky way of going to work I felt compelled to make the best of things.

I dressed her hand, with various little surreptitious squeezings, and went home, still wondering what would happen.

Was I to be discovered, after all, in an affair which brought me nothing? Or would my luck still hold good? Much depended upon how the diplococcus acted—where would it form a colony of poisonous germs, ever growing and spreading through the blood-stream? Would he die of meningitis, pneumonia or pyæmia? I did not want pneumonia. I could only hope for the quickest end.

One thing was certain. I must be in constant attendance, and if I could get a moment, remove the broken half of that tell-tale needle.

Next morning I called early, when my patient's mother received me coldly. I could see she had taken offence at my action of the previous afternoon. But so far all was well.

As to my patient, his temperature had already risen a degree and a half. Something was at work—somewhere. Where?

It was a curious waiting for a day or two, Brown. I knew that a determination must arise, but was helpless to say what. I only saw the little woman just to dress her badly scalded hand, and, when I got a chance, to reprimand her severely for taking so drastic a course.

“I promised you, dear,” she said, “and I meant to keep my word thoroughly.”

On the third day Manne-Martyn became delirious and so seriously ill that his mother demanded a consultation.

We got Hubert Harrison, of Harley Street, but as I told him beforehand about the hasheesh and the alcohol he did not bother himself. In fact asked me what I would like him to say.

“He’s certainly going to die, is he not?” I suggested.

“Most certainly,” answered the specialist. “It looks like acute meningitis.”

“Then tell them straight out,” I said. “And mention that I could not, in your opinion, have done anything more.”

“Of course, of course,” replied the great

man. "I'm sure of that. Really a good thing, I expect," he concluded.

There was, of course, intense agitation and many tears as the result of his opinion; but I took no heed. I could not forget the sick man's treatment of his wife.

Well—he died, and when I made my final examination by myself, I managed to withdraw that incriminating piece of steel.

I ran a very big risk over that. If only he had at any time been rational enough to locate the seat of his pain I should have probably been discovered.

But the Devil looks after his own, and certainly he kept a watchful eye over me on that occasion.

I saw a good deal of the widow for some months after this, but I was too busy to see her often enough, and she found and married a fellow on the Stock Exchange.

Yes, Rita was very charming, but dangerous—and fickle.

CHAPTER XVII

IN WHICH I AM DISCOVERED!

THIS is the last episode in my career, because, old friend, before to-morrow's sun rises, I shall have discovered whether there be a hereafter or not. You know well that I have always been a pure agnostic—knowing nothing, believing nothing—risking everything! With all my care and attention to detail I have at last been found out!

Certainly a most unlooked-for and out of the way grouping together of circumstances has been the cause.

I knew that sooner or later, if I continued taking risks, that the end would come. It has. This is a serious and hanging affair. However, I have had ten years of life—of life, man, not of the plant-like existence lived by most folk, but ten years, with every minute giving me the feeling of being really and actively alive.

What a difference!

Of course, you are anxious to hear my story. It is the last one, the *grand finale*, of More d'Escombe.

If I had not been a keen fisherman, I should not be writing this. Now I have thrown my last fly — I'm sorry — for some things.

About a month ago, I went for the weekend to Dingley, in Hampshire, a village where I can get some good trout fishing from the landlord of the inn, and in which I rent a small cottage during the all-too-short season — April to the early part of June. I went out on the Sunday, ready for a happy day, my luncheon case and flask full, plenty of spare tackle, and flies galore.

A very good rise took place about eleven, but for the life of me I couldn't find the fly they were taking. I could see about twenty different patterns on the water, but the trout were only taking one kind. I worked my way up stream, and at last with a large very dark olive, I got a brace of beauties within ten minutes.

Shortly after this, I saw a lovely fish rising continually in a run close by a large snag.

A most difficult spot to fish, but I could see that the riser was an extra big one.

I threw too low down, and only just saved my cast from the snag.

The next time the fly went right over him—no, he wouldn't touch—when, splash! and my reel was ringing out with a lovely buzz, and the rod was bent to its straining point.

By Jove! What a beautiful trout! How he dashed about, now to one bank, now to the other. If only I had a friend with me to land my prize.

A harsh voice broke in on my thoughts.

"Give us the net, Guv'nor; I'll land him for you."

I looked round, and saw a ragged, dirty-looking man, with loafer and vagabond written in his coarse face and bleared eyes.

"Do you know how?" I inquired hurriedly.

He laughed a rasping guffaw.

"Do I know how! I 'specs I've caught more trout than you've ever thought of," he said. "Does old Bob Gye know how?"

"All right," I snapped; "take the net, then, and don't stand there laughing in that silly way."

He certainly did his part of the work well, and the eyes of the old poacher, as I suspected him to be, glistened as he held up a lovely fish well over three pounds.

As he held up the capture at arm's length, I gave a sudden start.

At last I had found a means at hand to make five thousand pounds, which just then was being dangled in front of me by Sir Walter Michelcombe. He was an immensely wealthy man, as you know, old chap, middle-aged, tall and handsome, and with a charming, pretty little wife.

But here was the trouble.

Michelcombe told me the whole thing in my house one night, being at the time very talkative and off his guard.

He put it down to the whisky.

It seems that he had fallen desperately in love with an actress in London, but she, knowing he was married, would have nothing to say to him.

This rejection only inflamed him the more, and he openly said in my room that night—meaning what he said, too—that he would give five thousand to be rid of his wife.

I laughingly said, "How long do you give me to do this for you?"

"A month—not a day longer."

"Very well." I jotted down a few words on an envelope and said, "Will you sign this?"

He read it—looked at me with wonder and yet fear in his eyes.

“Are you serious?” he asked.

“As serious as a man can be at this time of night, but sign it—no harm done anyway,” I replied.

He signed. It was an I.O.U. for £5,000—provided the conditions were fulfilled.

That was all—no conditions were mentioned.

This conversation was vividly recalled to my mind by the tramp, for on his wrist was a bright circular spot, with an inflamed angry-looking blush around it.

“How long have you had that, my man?” I inquired.

“I got that unloading skins at Bristol two days ago,” he growled, “and damnation bad I be with it.”

I examined it carefully. It was anthrax—malignant pustule—without a doubt.

“If that is not removed immediately,” I said to him, “it’s all up with you, Master Bob Gye. Do you understand, it’s got to be cut out to save your life.”

The poor wretch became suddenly faint, and a deadly livid pallor took the place of his beery redness, the while his knees were trembling violently.

I pulled out my flask.

"Here, man, have a good drink, and cheer up. Don't give in. I'm a doctor myself, and if you like to come to my cottage this evening, I will remove that horrible sore, and put you right again. In the meantime, for God's sake, keep it covered up—don't let a soul catch sight of it. You're highly infectious, and if you are caught now, you will certainly be shut up for some time. Here's half-a-crown, and get some light good food and come and see me at nine." I told him the name of my cottage, and was not sorry to see him slouch off.

You say to yourself, Brown, "That's not quite like More d'Escombe, to operate on an ordinary tramp, especially in such an infectious and deadly condition."

Quite right, old man, but I wanted the anthrax bacillus, and here was the opportunity to get it—far from home—far from London—far from the person who would develop it.

In London I could have made a stab-culture in gelatine, or a culture on either agar or blood serum. I knew the colonies of bacilli. I had observed them often beneath my microscope, beautiful wavy wreaths, like locks of hair, radiating from the centre and apparently terminating in a point which, how-

ever, on examination with a high power objective, is observed to be a filament which turns upon itself.

Yes, my dear fellow, as you know by experience, bacteriology is a beautiful study. You discover fresh forms of life every day.

The bacillus anthracis is extremely interesting. In bouillon, after twenty-four hours' incubation at 37° C., there are shown irregularly spiral threads suspended in the liquid. And these, on being examined, are seen to be made up of bundles of parallel chains of bacilli. Later growth is more abundant and forms a flocculent mass at the bottom of the fluid. But I wanted it at once, and the delay necessary for cultivation was by this happy chance avoided.

I did no more fishing on that day. I had two miles to walk back to the domicile.

I strolled along the bank, smoking and thinking deeply—so deeply that I almost ran into a very pretty and well-dressed nurse who was going in the opposite direction.

I note with a strange, cynical amusement how the present *impasse* has arisen through a number of things happening which were, not merely one or two, but the whole of them, most unlikely and extraordinary.

The fact of meeting this nurse, little as I knew it, was the first link which was to drag me out of this sphere. I looked at her with a languid interest, wondering who was ill in the neighbourhood, and noticing the well-cut features and handsome figure which she possessed.

She, in her turn, looked me straight in the face as she passed. I arrived home, took off my fishing clothes, and settled down to a most excellent little dinner.

I could hardly believe that the tramp would face the music, but I got the material ready for removing the pustule. Most certainly, nine tramps out of ten would have shied at the knife, but this one formed the second link of the chain, made up of improbabilities, by turning up.

Very ill and bad he looked, and I gave him as little chloroform as possible, and did the small operation with the greatest dispatch.

When he came round, he had a drink—the poor wretch couldn't eat—and then I gave him five shillings, and told him to take the train out of Dingley at once.

“If you're here to-morrow,” I said, “I shall be compelled to inform the local authorities about you.”

· He promised to go, and he did, much to my satisfaction.

I now had the means of inoculating any number of persons with anthrax, and no one knew that such a bacillus was in my possession.

It is a very uncommon condition, and the ordinary cultivation tubes could easily be traced in London, if necessary. But here, as I say, I was safe from possession of the virus being attributed to me, if anything untoward did crop up.

What a small and hopeless fool is man, if fate is against him !

I was always more or less in attendance on Lady Michelcombe, who was a *petite*, fragile-looking little woman, with large dark eyes, which opened wide when she talked to you, and a charming, although somewhat childish manner. A very lovable little lady, who looked upon Michelcombe himself, big, burly, and overbearing as he was, as her lord and master, in very truth.

A woman who deserved to be loved and made much of ; really a very pleasing character, and yet Michelcombe wanted her out of the way.

I must say I had a few qualms of conscience at the idea of doing this, but I was dreadfully

pushed for money; you see, I have such expensive tastes, and it is marvellous how money goes.

I went a few days after my return from Dingley to pay a professional call on Lady Michelcombe, whom I found lying on a sofa, clad in a most fascinating garment, which somehow fixed itself on my mind. It was pale yellow, made of some soft clinging material, loosely made and yet at the same time seeming to fit everywhere.

You will say to yourself, Brown, "It is about time the poor fellow was out of it, if he is coming to this." Well, I suppose I am feeling a bit strained to-night, and I couldn't help thinking about that frock. Lady Michelcombe looked more childish than usual that morning.

"You wicked man, you've quite deserted me lately; now come and confess to me. Who is it?"

"My dear Lady Michelcombe, instead of chiding, you should pity me," I answered. "I have been using great self-control in remaining away for the week I arranged, and overcome the temptation to run in and see you every day."

"I don't think I shall believe you," she said,

with the curious little rippling laugh peculiar to her. "I might have been dead and buried for all you knew."

"You certainly look very much alive and above ground at present, and you have on a most charming gown," I replied.

"Now I want you to tell me about my heart, doctor," said my patient. "I don't believe it is quite right."

"Oh, I am sure it is," I answered, "but I will make sure," and producing a stethoscope, I went through the form of examining her chest. While I was doing so she gave a little scream.

"Oh, doctor, you've scratched my arm, you bad man."

"Where?" I said, putting the stethoscope away.

"Look, it's bleeding, you cruel monster; and see, there's the reason," pointing to my coat sleeve, in the cuff of which was sticking a pin.

"I really am very sorry, Lady Michelcombe," said I. "I apologize most humbly. It is a bad scratch. I will send you something to put on it. It would never do to have an arm like that disfigured for any length of time."

"Yes, and it hurts, too. I dismiss you until you show your contrition by attending personally to the wound you have made."

"I will come back very soon, and dress the gash," I replied, with a smile, which she returned. "*Au revoir.*"

In about half an hour the scratch was tied up with a little ointment dressing on it.

The bacillus anthracis was abundant in the ointment. I looked in again in the evening, and exchanged the first box of ointment for one that was innocuous, and went away, feeling as safe as possible.

In two days, Lady Michelcombe was very ill, and I had a consultant called in, and a nurse sent for.

The consultant was a man known to be against operating, and has attained his present exalted position, not by the possession of much learning or skill, but by a manner, a presence, and a talent for diplomacy and tact. The nurse—here again, note the unkindness of fate, was, to my surprise, the very girl whom I had met on the river bank some days before. She informed me that she was Lord Michelcombe's half-sister, but her manner was stiff and ungracious.

I discovered that she was nursing not to make a livelihood, but for the love of it.

Lady Michelcombe was operated on, in my opinion, twenty-four hours too late.

She died on the following day, and many searching inquiries were made as to the origin of her illness. Of course, nothing was discovered, and I felt quite safe.

Then came the worst, the “unkindest cut” of all. That idiot Michelcombe developed anthrax, evidently caught from his wife. He was a bad subject, a notorious drinker, a man who had lived hard, and undermined his once fine constitution.

A nasty, indescribable feeling came over me when I was informed by a note from the nurse that another medical man had been called in, and that my services were not required.

I began to see red. Two days passed. They seemed to me like two years.

What was happening? Was Michelcombe going to pull through? What would he say? How much could he let out? Our arrangement!

Discovery seemed impossible. I had covered my tracks very carefully, yet my mind misgave me.

I took an enormous quantity of morphia in that time. On the second evening the storm burst.

I heard the door-bell ring, and in a few moments, “Miss Cardew” was announced.

Miss Cardew was the nurse—the nurse. She

came into my room, pale-faced, with her mouth set, and an ugly glint in her eyes.

"Lord Michelcombe died an hour ago," she said, in a cold, calm voice, "and before he died he told me the infamous and horrible plot between you and him. How God allows such a man as you to remain on this earth, is a wonder to me. That such a cold-blooded, heartless, wicked villain could exist, I have never imagined."

"You are going a little too far, Miss Cardew," said I. "May I ask you to what you refer?"

"To what! Oh, if I were a man, and could thrash you until you screamed for mercy—and then let you die the death you brought on that poor little woman."

"You make assertions which you are quite unable to substantiate," I answered. "I beg you to be careful in what you are saying about me."

"You blind fool!" she half shouted at me. "You think I don't know—I know everything. Little did you think that I, too, saw the tramp at the village, and his wrist also."

This was the worst blow of all. Here was the connecting evidence which could hang me. What miserable luck!

I was too thunderstruck to say anything for the moment, and she continued :

“Yes, he showed me his pustule, and asked me if it was right to have it removed. Little did I think that this wretch was to cause the death of my best friend at the hands of the greatest fiend unhung !”

I stood dumbfounded.

Her eyes glared and flashed with passion as she spoke, and if looks could kill, I should not have survived a second.

I remained standing, looking almost fascinated, as it were, at the woman who had run me to earth, and who had the pluck to come and tell me all she knew.

What could I do ?

“I am going to place all my facts before the police to-morrow morning, if you are alive, Dr. More d’Escombe. Doctor ! Good heavens ! I wonder how many poor, unsuspecting souls you have doctored to death ? You have twelve hours, and a private detective is watching you for me, if you try to bolt. You’re a coward, I’ve no doubt. If you take the correct course, I shall keep quiet for the sake of the reputation of the minor villain, my dead half-brother. If I have never done a good action before, and never do one again, I

am satisfied with my life in ridding the world of such a monster as you."

She turned swiftly and left the room before I had time to say a word, leaving me still standing.

I had a big drink, thought it over thoroughly. There was no getting away from the evidence. Everything dove-tailed so beautifully.

I must go home to Kensington and die in a respectable way, or something of the kind. Only this one infernal woman knew. By Heaven! if I could silence her——Ah!—

* * * * *

I a.m. Bah! it's no use, my old friend, I can't get near her. She has a couple of private detectives on the watch.

Good-bye! Most probably, I shall go off for my last sleep in about an hour.

Beaten by a woman!

Let my career serve as a warning to others.

THE END

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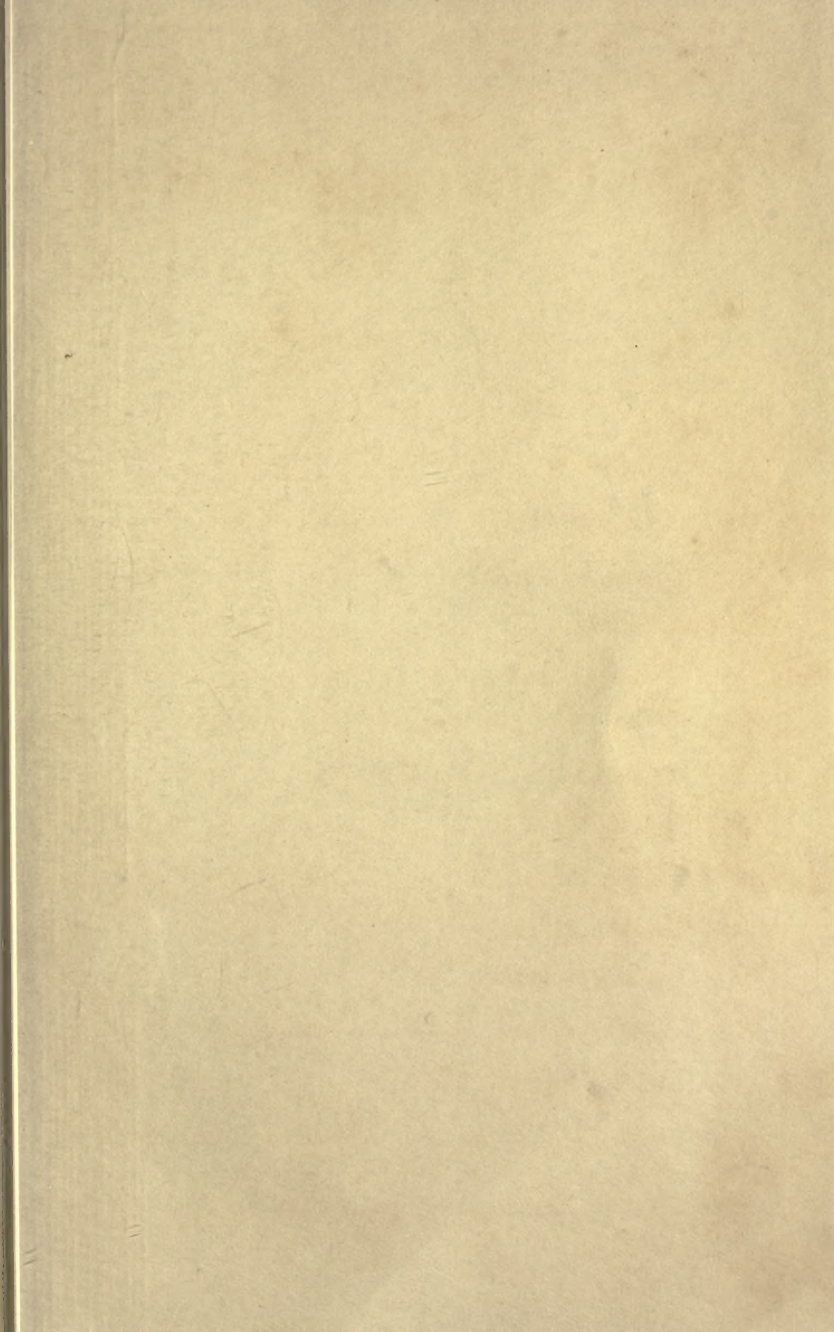
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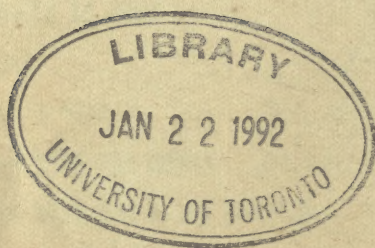
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115 THE WHITE HOUSE	M. E. Braddon
116 DESTINY	Alice & Claude Askew
117 EUGENE VIDOCQ	Dick Donovan
118 IN THE VORTEX	Clive Holland

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